

Behavior Medication



Does My Dog Need Medication?

Medication lessens anxiety and fear so your pet can learn.

Stress causes many changes in how the brain works. Stress motivates us into action, but too much of it can also lead to anxiety and a muddled thinking. Large amounts of stress will trigger survival mechanisms such as fight (aggression) or flight (fear). If the pet's fight/flight response is out of proportion to reality, medication can be used to bring it closer to "normal".

1

STRESS

Can lead to anxiety, phobias, and aggression

2

MEDICATION

Used to create a brake pedal for anxiety and stress which is out of control.

3

TRAINING

Installs a new behavior while establishing a new and improved view of the trigger.

MEDICATION TYPES



As Needed

Medications given just for specific occasions, such as fireworks.



Daily Medication

Given when triggers can happen any time or the pet has more chronic stress.



Sedating

This type used for very stressful events to avoid trauma, such as vet visits.

Why is My Dog Like This?

Genetics, learning, and personality.

The blending of genetics can lead to a predisposition for some behavioral issues (such as anxiety), thus appropriate breeding can be an important factor. As the mother goes through pregnancy, her stress (nutritional deficiencies, environment, physical and mental stressors) can also influence the mental development of her puppies. When born, the amount of maternal care and interactions with the rest of the litter become an early development pattern for what's "normal". Puppies are constantly exploring, trying new things, and learning the consequences for those efforts. If not safe guarded, some pups become traumatized by bad interactions, training methods, or events. Each dog is an individual, thus an event that upsets one dog may not be acknowledged by another. The dog's personality, whether shy or outgoing, sensitive or brash, will determine how these events are processed into the developing dog's world view. By the age of social maturity (1.5–3 years of age), the result of genetics, learning, and personality become more apparent. In general, this is the most common period for reactive,

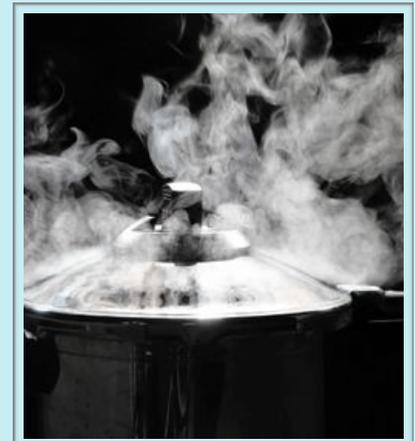


aggressive, or fearful behaviors to surface. This behavior presents itself as a result of actions and consequences experienced by the dog. Some dogs are impulsive, becoming reactive out of frustration. Others are fearful, and when confronted will shake, run, or hide. Fear can lead to proactive behavior to ensure safety, such as barking, growling, and biting. These behaviors are understandable in the right situation, yet in some dogs, they seem way out of proportion. These dogs often don't have a "training problem", they have an emotional problem, which requires therapy in the form of behavioral therapy. The behavioral therapy will teach the dog new coping mechanisms as well as installing a new positive association with the trigger. If the dog's reaction is severe, the trigger is difficult to determine or can't be controlled, medication is often indicated.

HOW DOES MEDICATION HELP?

If your dog is presented with an upsetting scenario and becomes reactive, that is known as being "over threshold". Stress is like a pressure cooker building up steam; after a certain point, the stress level will blow the top off the pot. As stress builds, the dog's brain goes into survival mode, meaning food, focus, and ability to perform cues goes out the window. Safety is your pet's only concern.

Medication lessens the effects of stress, slowing the build up of steam, and allowing for behavioral therapy routines to take hold. This is especially helpful with dogs who tend to be anxious or easily triqqered.



“I don’t want a zombie dog!”

Many clients are hesitant to consider medication because they fear it changes the dog’s personality or it will be sedated. Medication only causes a temporary change which only lasts as long as the dog takes it. If you don’t like what you see, you discontinue the drug. It doesn’t change the dog’s personality. Instead it brings out more of the things you LOVE about your pet, and wish other people could see. Remember: stress is often the cause of many unwanted behaviors.

Some medications are given specifically to be sedating. If your dog is going to the vet, groomer, boarding facility, or has hyper attachment issues, it’s best they feel very relaxed or even sleep to prevent stress, destructiveness, or aggression in triggering situations. These medications are only given as needed since they often make dogs drowsy.

Medications simply reduce anxiety, so there’s less reactive behavior. Your pet may sleep better, listen more effectively, and be a bit less fearful in formerly triggering situations.

There are many medications to choose from depending on your pet’s needs. Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI) are often used for anxiety. Others, such as Gabapentin, Clonidine, and Trazodone, can be given only as needed. Valium or Xanax, are used for events which cause severe panic.

Many of the medications are generic forms of human medications, making them lower in cost in comparison to over the counter remedies AND have been proven effective.

“Long term meds? It’ll shorten his life!”

Psychotropic medications have a long history in animal behavioral medicine and human medicine. The drugs used have a narrow side effect range and won’t shorten the pet’s life span, regardless if it’s a senior or a puppy. In fact, due to being in better psychological health, the dog’s welfare increases and provides a better longer quality of life.

Additionally, many pets won’t need long term medication if they receive appropriate behavioral therapy from a certified behavior professional or consultant. Medication improves the reactivity and training provides coping skills needed to create permanent behavior changes.

“Will the medication fix her aggression?”

Medication can often decrease or resolve problems such as compulsive behaviors and Separation Anxiety. They **can not** resolve aggression. Aggressive behavior stems from a combination of fear and the perception that the “best defense is a good offense”. In these situations, behavioral therapy is used in conjunction with medication to improve the pet’s association with the trigger.

“How will I know if it’s working?”

We ask clients to write down their pet’s triggers from most to least scary. If the medication is working, smaller triggers begin to fall away, allowing you to focus on the most concerning ones. Anxious behaviors such as panting,

pacings, whining, stiffness, hesitance, shaking, hiding, and so on should also lessen. Your pet will also have a slightly better tolerance in distance, duration, and intensity with the main trigger.

“Holistic” or “natural” isn’t always better.

Supplements can be helpful for pets with mild to moderate anxiety, but it’s important to look for trusted brands.

Essential oils, body wraps, and even some over the counter “anti-anxiety” supplements lack evidence that they work. Supplements are not strictly regulated, thus they don’t have to offer extensive research trials with animals to prove they do anything.

Additionally, manufacturers are not scrutinized. A label may indicate a certain amount of an ingredient, but there’s no regulating body that *guarantees* the amount of the ingredient is present, that it can be utilized by the body effectively, or if it might cause interactions with another supplement or medication.

Just because something is “natural” doesn’t mean that it’s as good, better, or lacks side effects when compared to a medication. For instance, CBD is very popular as a “natural” remedy, thus medical clinical trials were devised in order to better understand its use. Thus far, initial studies show some augmentation of liver function in certain patients. Whether these changes go away once it is no longer being given is to be determined. What is known: CBD varies in potency depending on manufacturer, and thus dosing has not been ironed out for regular use in regard to behavioral issues. With

more study, it can be determined whether CBD can be effectively indicated for use.

That being said, we do have other products from specific manufacturers who have provided research and gained the trust of the medical field.

Ingredient	Name Brand
Dog appeasing Pheromone	Adaptil products
Alpha Casozepine	Zylkene, Royal Canin Calm Diet
L-theanine	Anxitane, Solliquin, Composure
Whey protein/colostrum	Sollequin, Composure

Where to find help

Trainers Directory

- [International Association of Animal Behavior Counselors](#)
- [Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers](#)
- [Academy for Dog Trainers](#)

Veterinary Behaviorist Directory

- [American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior](#)

General Resources

- [CARE for Reactive Dogs](#)
- [I Speak Dog](#)