

Stressed Pets

www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

Problems create stress and stress makes problems - for pets and humans. Prevention is better than cure.

Stress is now recognised as a significant cause of health problems in humans. Pets help us relieve stress, but have you ever thought that your pet could also be suffering?

Stress is mental, emotional or physical tension caused by factors outside the animal's control.

Unfortunately, animals are unable to tell us when they are stressed. It is therefore important that the pet owner is able to understand the causes and recognise the warning signs to help prevent stress.

PREVENTION STARTS IN THE EARLY WEEKS

Puppies and kittens need to learn how to interact with people and other animals (a process called socialisation) as well as what is acceptable behaviour in their environment (habituation). If a pet does not receive enough exposure to people and animals within a normal domestic environment in the early weeks, it will be more susceptible to stress. Your pet may feel threatened by simple challenges in the world around it, such as the sound of a vacuum cleaner, the arrival of a visitor or the sight of a passing lorry.



COMMON CAUSES OF STRESS

Changes to the environment - being kept in an unfamiliar environment such as kennels or a veterinary surgery or changes to the home such as renovation or redecoration can be stressful for both cats and dogs. Keeping your pet in an overcrowded environment or in a state of confinement should also be avoided. Remember that cats especially rely on the safety of their home territory.

Changes to lifestyle - alterations in the owner's daily routine can affect the household and may result in the pet being left alone for longer periods of time. Changes to the composition of the household, for example by the arrival of a new baby or another pet, can be unsettling for cats and dogs

Grief - the loss of a companion, either human, canine or feline can lead to symptoms of grief in pets too. Time taken to recover will vary and alterations in behaviour are common throughout the process.

Exposure to unfamiliar sights and sounds - some pets are very sensitive to thunder and fireworks for example. Even the noise of a family quarrel can cause symptoms of stress.

PREVENTION RATHER THAN CURE

By following responsible pet ownership practice, knowing what can trigger stress and being able to recognise the warning signs, stress can be avoided.

Ensuring the pet is socialised and getting it used to the sounds and actions in your world from an early stage will also go a long way towards the elimination of stress. If you find that your pet is made nervous by certain things then removing, modifying or controlling these will enable you to avoid the symptoms of stress.

Remember, however, that most stress in pets is minor and that with good care and awareness it is easily preventable.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY PET IS STRESSED?

Stressed pets show similar responses to humans under stress. For example, general health may deteriorate as a result of the immune system's reduced ability to fight infection. Vets have reported that recovery time after surgery can be lengthened in animals that are under stress. Behavioural changes will vary in pets, generally involving both increased reactions to sights and sounds and inhibition of normal behaviour. Anxiety, irritability, hostility, depression and fear are all warning signs.

Behavioural warning signs - dogs

- Refusal to eat or groom. Alterations in sleep patterns. Lack of interest in the environment or an increase in reactivity.
- Inability to face challenges, even within the home environment. Previously confident dogs may begin to hide when faced with new situations.
- Excessive panting or salivation and intermittent unexplained vomiting.
- In extreme stress, dogs may exhibit repetitive behaviour such as tail chasing, pacing or shadow staring.
- Cowering, flattening of ears and tail down. (Cont'd on page 2)

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Behavioural warning signs - cats

- Increased indoor marking in the form of urine spraying, scratching and even depositing faeces in the house.
- Inhibition of normal play behaviour and an unwillingness to explore or interact with owner.
- Excessive attention seeking behaviour directed towards the owner.
- Increased time sleeping.
- Increased salivation and intermittent unexplained vomiting or regurgitation.

Changes in health/appearance in cats and dogs

- Anorexia, vomiting and/or diarrhoea with no detectable medical causes.
- Excessive grooming in the form of licking; scratching; nibbling which leads to patches of hair loss and areas of sore skin with no identifiable medical cause.

Most stress occurring in pets is only minor. Some of the changes in behaviour, health or appearance which are associated with stress may also be the result of medical problems. If you are at all concerned you should refer to your veterinary surgeon without delay.

We would like to thank the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC) for its assistance in developing this leaflet.



If you need advice on a behavioural problem (which may be linked with stress), please contact the APBC:

Tel: 01386 751 151

Email: info@apbc.org.uk

Remember a healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet means a happy owner!

The Pet Health Council was formed in 1979 with the specific aim of promoting the health and welfare of pet animals in the interests of both pets and people. The PHC works with medical and veterinary advisers who are experts in this field.

The leaflet range currently comprises the following:

Insuring your Pet	Pets and The Family
Choosing a Pet	Your Pet's Teeth
Fit Not Fat	Practical Steps for Healthy Pets
Getting a Puppy	Stressed Pets
Health Benefits of Pets	The Facts about Toxocara
International Pet Travel	The Facts about Toxoplasmosis
Nutrition for Cats and Dogs	Worm Your Dog
Pets and Allergies	Your First Pet

Download leaflets from the PHC website:
www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

The Pet Health Council 
working for healthy pets & people

The Five Golden Rules to Successful Pet Ownership

1. Follow a preventive health programme for your pet that includes:
 - a good diet
 - regular exercise
 - worming
 - vaccination
 - annual veterinary check ups
 - health insurance
2. Observe basic hygiene practices around your pet
3. Respect your pet, you have a duty of care, to fulfil your pet's basic needs including privacy and space as well as love and attention
4. Be a responsible owner, clear up after your animal and be considerate of other people and animals
5. Consider the changing needs of your pet throughout his life.

Associated organisations of the Pet Health Council include:

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy, Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors, British Small Animal Veterinary Association, British Veterinary Association, National Office of Animal Health, National Pharmacy Association, Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and Society for Companion Animal Studies.



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