



Stress Relief for Your Pet

Stress and anxiety often cause behavior problems in our pets. Stressed-out cats may have litterbox problems or begin fighting with other pets. Anxious dogs may be destructive, escape, urine mark, or simply pant and pace. There are plenty of everyday things that stress out our pets—nail trimming, trips to the vet, fireworks, houseguests, and more.

If your pet suffers from anxiety, you should first consult with your veterinarian. Once you've ruled out any physical problems, you can discuss behavior modification techniques and, if necessary, prescription anti-anxiety medication. If your pet's problems aren't severe enough to call for prescription medication, there are some over-the-counter products you can try to help him feel calmer and more collected.

Pheromone Products

Pheromones are used in a variety of applications to influence animal emotions and behaviors. Comfort Zone makes a pheromone product that can help cats feel less anxious. Also called Feliway, the product comes in two versions. The spray version may be used inside your cat's carrier, for example, or on a towel that you can keep near him when clipping toenails. The plug-in diffuser version can be used in your home. The diffuser covers a 500-650 square-foot area and is useful for more prolonged exposure to stressful situations.

You may find it useful if you are introducing a new person or animal to your household or when guests disrupt your cat's normal routine. The active ingredient in Feliway is a synthetic version of the pheromone cats leave behind when they use their cheeks to mark objects. This pheromone helps cats feel happy, comfortable, and secure in their environment.

A similar product for dogs, Adaptil, contains a substance called "dog-appeasing pheromone." It may be used to help dogs with noise phobia, mild separation anxiety, or other situations that cause stress. The active ingredient in Adaptil is a synthetic version of the pheromone produced by nursing female dogs.

Pheromones are safe for animals and do not affect humans. Comfort Zone and Adaptil products can be purchased at most pet supply stores or through online sources.

Body Wraps

Wrapping a dog in a snug undergarment may help reduce stress. The wrap is believed to help calm sensory reception, similarly to swaddling an infant or using a weighted blanket.

This remedy is based on therapeutic touch and on work done with children with autism. The most well-known brand is Thundershirt, although there are many that are similar.

Supplements

Two products use a combination of natural ingestible ingredients that are known to have anxiety-relief benefits. Composure (made by Vetri-Science®) and Calming (made by PetNaturals®) contain L-theanine, an amino acid, thiamine (Vitamin B1), and colostrum. Composure is made to be given twice daily and becomes effective after the animal has been taking it for 10 to 14 days. Calming is designed to be used in short-term situations and becomes effective within 15 minutes and lasts for several hours. For more information, you can visit the manufacturers' Web sites at vetriscience.com and petnaturals.com.

Like us, individual dogs and cats may respond differently to different treatments, so you'll want to experiment to see what works best for your pet.

Get Help

If your pet is experiencing a lot of stress or anxiety during a specific event or around a specific trigger, please contact Homeward Pet Adoption Center's Animal Behavior Manager or another certified professional to help you put together a behavior modification protocol to help you and your pet.

Note: None of these products are intended as an automatic cure for behavior problems. Each should be used in conjunction with behavior modification techniques. Some products may work better than others on your animal and others may not have an effect at all. All of the products are natural and not known to cause harm.

The suggestions provided are for informational purposes and are not intended as a substitute for advice from a veterinarian. The products mentioned are not approved for the diagnosis, treatment, or prevention of disease. For more information on the use and efficacy of these products, please refer to the directions provided by the manufacturers or contact them directly.