

Your Dog Hates It When You Do These 10 Things

The more you know about what triggers your pet's anxiety, how he reacts when stressed and how it can impact his health, the better you'll be able to take actions to stop doing them. And that can only magnify your dog's bond with you. So get started today.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Just like people, dogs also suffer from stress, and chronic stress in particular can affect your pet's overall health and quality of life
- Common signs of stress in dogs include nose or lip licking, yawning and panting
- Common stress triggers include changes in your dog's environment, punishment-based training methods and lack of opportunities to express breed-related behaviors (e.g., herding, running or retrieving)
- While some things that cause your dog stress are outside your control, there are many things you can do to reduce stressors in your pet's environment

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published February 20, 2017.

If you're like many dog parents, you may find it hard to believe your over-indulged pet who doesn't have a care in the world gets stressed out. But it's important to keep in mind that canine stressors are very different from human stressors, and studies show dogs can and often do experience stress.

Research also shows that stress can affect a dog's health and longevity. According to one study:

"There is evidence to suggest that the stress of living with a fear or anxiety disorder can have negative effects on health and lifespan in the domestic dog."¹

An example: When your dog is under stress, his body releases an excessive amount of norepinephrine, the fight or flight hormone, which can alter gut bacteria and interfere with GI tract motility.²

Next thing you know, your dog has diarrhea, which just adds to his stress level (and yours), especially if he has an accident in the house. Some dogs primarily experience short-lived stress, but others deal with chronic stress.

The more you know about what triggers your pet's stress, how he behaves when he feels stressed and what stress can do to his health, the better equipped you'll be to identify the signs and take action to minimize or eliminate stressors.

Common Signs of Stress and Stress Triggers in Dogs

According to the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) 2009 Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural Medicine, there are 10 common signs of stress in dogs:³

1. Nose/lip licking
2. Yawning
3. Panting
4. Reduced or absent appetite
5. Diarrhea
6. Tail lowered or tucked
7. Ears pulled or pinned back
8. Cowering/crouched body posture and/or hiding
9. Trembling/shaking
10. Increased vocalizations — whining, howling or barking

The same manual also lists the 10 most common stress triggers in dogs:

1. **Novelty** — Exposure to new items, new people, new animals, etc.
2. **Loud noises** — Fireworks, thunderstorms, etc.
3. **Changes in housing** — Moving to a new home, boarding, etc.
4. **Changes in household members** — New baby, new pet, loss of pet or human, house-guests, etc.
5. **Changes in household routine** — New job schedule, kids returning to school, holidays, etc.
6. **Punitive training methods** — Shock collars, yelling, hitting, etc.
7. **Invasion of personal space** — Disruption when resting, hugging, kissing, forcibly restraining, etc.
8. **Lack of outlets for normal breed behaviors** — Herding, running, retrieving, etc.
9. **Separation from human family members** — Separation anxiety, etc.
10. **Poor (strained) relationships with other household members (pets or humans), etc.**

Some of the things that cause stress in dogs can be unavoidable, such as a move to a new home or a change in work schedules. However, as you can see from the above list, there are several triggers you can exert control over to minimize stress in your dog's life. For example:

- Replace punitive training with positive reinforcement behavior training.
- Make sure everyone in the household understands and respects your dog's need for uninterrupted sleep and appropriate canine-friendly handling.
- Most dogs, especially working and sporting breeds, need much more exercise than they get, so a great place to start in reducing your pet's stress is to increase her daily physical activity level.
- Dogs are social creatures who get lonely and bored when forced to stay alone for long stretches.

If there's no one home during the day to keep your dog company, I recommend recruiting a friend or neighbor or hiring a dog walker to take him for a stroll around the block, at a minimum. An alternative is doggy daycare.

13 Additional Tips to Reduce Your Dog's Stress

1. Leave your dog with an article of clothing or blanket with your scent on it.
2. Leave a treat-release toy for your dog to focus on in your absence. Place small treats around the house for her to discover, along with her favorite toys.
3. Add a flower essence blend like Separation Anxiety from Spirit Essences to her drinking water. This works wonders for some dogs. And put on some soothing doggy music before you leave.
4. Invest in an Adaptil collar or diffuser for your dog. These products release a pheromone that's designed to have a calming effect on dogs.
5. Make sure your dog gets plenty of exercise, playtime, mental stimulation and TLC. The fuller her life is when you're around, the calmer she'll be when you're not.
6. Play calm, soothing music before a possible stressor occurs. This may relax your dog and have the added bonus of drowning out distressing noises.
7. If your dog seems to respond well to pressure applied to her body, there are wraps available (e.g., Thundershirt, TTouch anxiety wrap) that many pet owners and veterinarians find extremely helpful.
8. Ttouch is a specific massage technique that can help anxious pets.
9. Consult your holistic vet about homeopathic, TCM (traditional Chinese medicine) or Rescue Remedy, as well as other specific Bach flower remedies that could be helpful in alleviating your dog's stress.

Products I use, always in conjunction with behavior modification, include homeopathic aconitum (or whatever remedy fits the symptoms best), Hyland's Calms Forte or calming milk proteins (variety of brands).

10. Calming nutraceuticals and herbs that can be of benefit include holy basil, l-theanine, rhodiola, ashwagandha, GABA, 5-HTP and chamomile. Consult your holistic vet about which makes sense for your pet.
11. The essential oil of lavender has also been proven to reduce a dog's stress response. I recommend placing a few drops on your dog's collar or bedding before a stressor occurs, if possible, or diffuse the oil around your house for an overall calming effect.
12. If you've adopted a dog who may have had a rocky start in life, I also highly recommend a program called "**A Sound Beginning**," which was lovingly and expertly designed to help rescue dogs and adoptive guardians learn to communicate effectively and form an unbreakable bond.
13. If your dog's stress seems to be getting worse instead of better, consider an individualized approach to managing her anxiety by allowing her to choose what best soothes her via applied zoopharmacognosy (self-healing techniques offered through a trained professional).

Sources and References

[Clinician's Brief](#)

¹ [Applied Animal Behaviour Science](#). July 2010, Volume 125, Issues 3-4, Pages 157-162

² [Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology](#). 2011 Dec;62(6):591-9

^{3, 4} [BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural Medicine](#)
