

# ANXIETY, FEAR AND PHOBIAS IN DOGS



It's normal for dogs to experience anxiety as it gives them the ability to prepare and respond to a threat. Anxiety can lead to significant physical changes such as an increased heart rate and blood pressure and it's believed these changes contribute to the emotion of fear.

Responding to threats is normal behaviour but when a dog can't cope with small changes in any new or unfamiliar situations it may develop an anxiety disorder. One response to anxiety is aggression. Anxiety and fear can lead to phobias, which can cause a dog acute, ongoing distress.

If you're worried, discuss your dog's behaviour with your vet.

## Situations which can produce anxiety and fear in dogs, include:

- Visiting your vet
- Rough handling
- Changes to daily routine
- Dietary changes
- Medical conditions
- A visitor to your home
- Poor early socialisation
- Other dogs or introduction of new dogs
- Thunderstorms and loud noise, such as fireworks.



## Signs a dog may be feeling anxious, include:

- Yawning, scratching or sniffing
- Avoiding eye contact
- Looking away
- Pulling the corners of the mouth back
- Salivating
- Pulling ears back
- Creeping around in slow motion
- Standing with tail tucked under.

Fear in dogs can lead to aggression. The risk of an aggressive response to anxiety is heightened if the dog feels trapped or is unable to cope with the intensity of the anxiety. If other signals of fear have been ignored then the dog may also resort to aggressive behaviour.

The earlier you seek advice from your vet, the better.

Your vet is ideally placed to help dogs with anxieties, fears and phobias. They can fully assess your dog and its environment and develop a program to help you and your dog confront the causes of its anxiety.

## A management plan developed by you and your vet may include:

- Checking for any underlying medical conditions
- Avoiding situations that could contribute to the dog's anxieties, fears and phobias
- Providing a safe place to cope or hide
- Managing the dog's environment so it's consistent, safe and predictable but variable enough to meet the dog's physical and emotional needs
- Teaching the dog to sit and relax in a wide variety of situations
- Medications and pheromones.