

Acupuncture Can Help Anxious Dogs

By Rachel Barrack DVM, CVA, CVCH, January 2019



Just like people, dogs experience an array of emotions, including anxiety, which can be provoked by fear, separation and environmental changes. Fear is the most common, often triggered by negative associations with events like loud noises such as fireworks or thunderstorms, riding in cars, or visits to the groomer or veterinarian. Isolation or absence of human companions, changes in daily routine, or new people or animals in the home may also result in anxious behaviors.



Dogs are individuals and each manifests anxiety differently. These manifestation can range from mild (crouching, hiding, tail-tucking) or moderate

(panting, shaking, trembling, extreme licking and chewing) to severe (excessive barking or howling, aggression, biting, destructiveness). An anxious dog may also lose urinary or fecal control or urinate or defecate in inappropriate places.

While people sometimes interpret these signs as “acting up,” they are not, and should not be ignored. Anxiety can be mentally and physically taxing; in a worst case scenario, anxious dogs can injure themselves, people in their environment or other dogs. If your dog is displaying these behaviors, speak with your veterinarian to rule out an underlying medical condition. Barring that, look for the causes and strive to modify or eliminate them. Be patient; behavioral issues often take time to address and correct.

In addition to positive reinforcement training, acupuncture and Chinese herbal therapy have been shown to greatly

reduce canine anxiety. A mainstay of Chinese medicine for thousands of years, acupuncture involves inserting thin, sterile, stainless-steel needles into specific points on the body. Most acupuncture points are located along 14 major channels, which form a network that carries blood and energy throughout the body.



Acupuncture produces a physiological response. It can provide pain relief, stimulate the immune and nervous systems, increase microcirculation, and decrease inflammation. Acupuncture can also help restore balance between organ systems for optimal health and overall well-being. In addition to these benefits, it has a noticeable calming effect. Often, dogs find acupuncture sessions so relaxing that they fall asleep once the needles are inserted.

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Chinese herbs are often used in conjunction with acupuncture to optimize and extend its effects. These herbs—which should only be given after consultation with a trained veterinary practitioner—are available in capsule, powder and tablet form and typically are readily ingested and easily digested. Psychotropic medications that help minimize anxiety in extremely nervous dogs can sometimes be used in conjunction with Chinese medicine (be sure to let your veterinarian know if you're giving your dog Chinese herbs). Consult with your veterinarian on the best options to alleviate your dog's anxiety, and consider acupuncture for a safe and gentle way to calm your canine.