



Car Sickness

Does Your Dog Get Car Sick?

IS YOUR DOG AFRAID OF CARS?

Carsickness--foaming, drooling, retching and/or vomiting--is almost always a product of negative reinforcement, and a lack of experience. Often, the dog that suffers from carsickness is a young puppy that has trouble keeping his balance in the moving vehicle or is afraid during his first few rides. The victim may be an older dog who never sees the inside of a car except when it's time to go to the veterinarian or the groomer. He may even be unlucky enough to get an additional set of rides to and from the boarding kennel when he is left there during his family's vacations. For these dogs, the car becomes a form of mental and physical stress. It's no wonder they get sick. Yet the majority of dogs love riding in cars. It is a treat beyond measure, the very thought of which fills the dog with uncontrollable excitement. Why does this disparity exist?

Some of the dogs that love car rides got to go in cars frequently when they were growing up and, fortunately, all the rides did not end at the veterinarian's office for vaccinations or surgery. They got used to the motion. They learned how to balance themselves. Perhaps, they were less sensitive to begin with and so could ride, even as young pups, without getting sick. Many times, since they did not react badly to initial car rides, their owners tended to take them along more frequently, thus ensuring that the problem wouldn't occur. Most rides ended in pleasant adventures or excursions. The car became something to look forward to and enjoy.

HERE WE GO...



Why some dogs are more sensitive than others is not really the issue. Any dog can get used to riding in the car, though some will take the experience better than others. The process of retraining a carsick dog, or training a young puppy to ride easily is the same.

What you want to do is to get the animal to associate pleasant things with the car, and to slowly disassociate unpleasant things. The car should become part of the dog's everyday existence. As he becomes able to ride well, it will be easier for you to take him along when you are traveling, shopping, or visiting friends.

Start from scratch and introduce the dog to the car. Let the dog sit in the car with you. The motor should not be running. The door can even remain open. If the dog seems fearful, just sit in the back seat with him and pet him for a few minutes. After you have reassured him, let him leave the car, on leash, and praise him again for his great behavior. That is all you have to do, once a day, for the first few days.

If the dog is extremely anxious about the car, save his meals for car training time. With the engine off, get in the back with your dog and his dinner. Praise him. Tell him everything is OK and let him eat in the car. (Do this in a positive, upbeat voice. You don't want to reinforce any fear behavior!) Keeping the engine off will ease his first few experiences. Once your dog will eat in the car, or spend a few minutes sitting in the back seat calmly, he should be less reluctant to enter the car. Now, you can put him in the back, close the door, hop in the front and start the engine. Go as gradually as your dog needs to implement these changes. Some dogs may take two weeks for each step, and some dogs may adjust in just a few days. How fast you go depends on the age of your dog, his sensitivity and the severity of his problem.

REWARD BRAVERY!

Once the dog will accept sitting in the car with the motor running for a minute or two, without any signs of car sickness, you can take him for a spin around the block. Make sure he has not eaten for a few hours. In fact, it would be best if his last meal were the day before. That way, he can get an additional reward for his bravery by getting his meal right after his ride. If, at any time, the dog begins to drool or foam, stop the car, shut the engine off and make sure the dog has plenty of air. Windows should be open enough for good airflow, but not enough for him to jump out. If he seems ill and stopping the car doesn't help, leash him and take him out of the car for a walk.

WHERE SHOULD YOUR DOG RIDE?

The safest place for your pup when riding in a car is in a crate. The protected, secure feeling your dog has in the crate will carry over to his car rides and help speed his recovery, but not every car has room for a dog crate.

Once your dog can motor around the block with no incident, you can increase the duration of his rides. It is just those short hops to the hardware store or dry cleaner that will get him hooked on the joy of riding in your car. By slowly increasing his riding time and by praising the dog for entering, sitting in the car and leaving the car calmly, plus the addition of all kinds of pleasant excursions at the end of each trip, your dog will begin to look forward to riding in the car and will begin to relax when he does ride. This procedure, plus the additional precaution of having him ride with an empty stomach and sufficient ventilation, should end all but the most stubborn of carsickness problems.



How can you ease your pet's anxiety?

- ◆ To decrease the chance of vomiting, withhold food for 8-10 hours before travel.
- ◆ Ask one of our veterinarians about sedating your pet for long trips. You may also want to discuss using a mild tranquilizer for a few short trips to build up your dog's confidence.
- ◆ Use a kennel cab to help your pet feel secure, and to keep him safe.
- ◆ For extended travel, take along several of the dog's chewies, toys, and a favorite bed. Familiar objects will help decrease stress.
- ◆ It's a good idea to take along a thermos of water from home to offer your dog along the way.
- ◆ Keep your pet on the diet that he's accustomed to. Anxiety and a change of diet could cause diarrhea.

