STRESS RELIEF FOR YOUR PET

What stresses your pet? A trip to the veterinarian? Overnight guests? Thunder and firecrackers? Leaving him alone? Clipping his toenails?

Stress and anxiety often cause behavior problems in our pets. Stressed-out cats may have litter-box problems or begin fighting with other pets. Anxious dogs may be destructive, escape, urine mark, or simply pant and pace.

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 more calm and 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 wrap around 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. Cheek marking is an activity that indicates a cat is happy and comfortable in his environment.

A similar product for dogs, Comfort Zone with D.A.P.®, 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 D.A.P. is a synthetic version of the pheromone produced by nursing female dogs.

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

Flower Essences

Flower essences are dilute extracts of various types of flowers and plants. They are used to treat emotional distress in animals and people. A liquid administered in very small doses (a few drops a day in your pet's water bowl), flower essences can be purchased at specialty pet supply stores, as well as most health food stores. One brand of flower essence, Bach Flower Remedies®, though originally created for humans, has been used successfully with pets. To learn more about the use of the Bach remedies read "Bach Flower Remedies for Animals," a book by Gregory Vlamis and Helen Graham. There are also flower essences created expressly for pets. One Web site you can check out is

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www.spiritessence.com.

Body Wraps

Wrapping a dog in a snug garment may help reduce stress. The wrap is believed to help calm sensory reception. This remedy is based on therapeutic touch and on work done with autistic children. Wraps can be purchased under the product name "Anxiety Wrap" on the Internet. An easy and inexpensive alternative is to fit the dog with a tight T-shirt, knotted on top of his back to make it snug.

Herbal Products

The aroma of some herbs has calming effects on animals and people. The Calming Collar incorporates a blend of herbs in a collar for dogs or cats. Go to www.calmingcollars.com for more information.

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 colustrum. 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.

Note: None of these products is 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.

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