

Does your dog suffer from separation anxiety?

Separation anxiety is a common canine disorder that can result in profound mental and emotional distress in your pet. When severe, separation anxiety can result in destruction in the home, house soiling and excessive howling and whining. In many dogs, the initial signs of separation anxiety are relatively mild, so you may not have noticed them. But it is the nature of these types of problems, that they will worsen with time if treatment is not initiated.



	YES	NO
1. Have you ever noticed that your dog appears to “know” when you are getting ready to leave? i.e. they begin to pant, pace, whine or follow you from room to room as you are preparing to leave?		
2. Does your dog pant, pace, whine, and/or follow you to the door when you leave the home?		
3. Does your dog normally follow you from room to room throughout your home and become stressed if you try to leave them alone in a room without you?		
4. Have you ever returned home to find that your dog has destroyed things in your absence?		
5. Does this destruction ONLY happen when there are no people at home?		
6. Assuming your dog is normally well house trained, do you ever return home to find that they has eliminated in the home?		
7. Does your dog ONLY eliminate in the home when no people are at home?		
8. Has a neighbor (or some other nearby person) ever reported that they hear your dog crying, whining or howling when you are not home?		

Interpreting the Questionnaire

If you answered “YES” to more than 3 of these questions, your dog is very likely experiencing some distress while alone.

If you answered “YES” to the first 5 questions (or more) then your dog very likely has separation anxiety.

If you answered “NO” to questions 5 or 7 then another diagnosis will need to be considered, possibly in lieu of or in addition to separation anxiety.

There are several other behavior conditions that can be easily confused with separation anxiety. In particular, some dogs can act “clingy” when their owners are home but not actually experience anxiety or distress after they leave. Some dogs may be fine when their owners leave until they hear a frightening noise such as a storm or other distressing event outside, then they panic and become destructive. Other dogs become destructive at windows or doors simply because they become excited or aggressively aroused about dogs, people or other animals outside. Some dogs that are destructive while in crates or cages do this because they appear to have a fear of confinement. When left unconfined in the home they are fine.

The only way to accurately confirm a diagnosis of separation anxiety is to video your dog after you leave him alone. Smart phones and tablets make collecting video of your pet easier than ever. Just follow the additional instructions, in “How to Collect Video of Your Pet”, that will be given to you by your veterinarian.

If your veterinarian has determined that your dog has separation anxiety, you want to do something to intervene as quickly as possible because this condition results in a great deal of suffering. Your veterinarian will determine and recommend which of these steps you need to take and when.





STEP 1 - Use ADAPTIL®

ADAPTIL® mimics the natural dog appeasing pheromone, the pheromone that mother dogs produce during the period of time that they are raising their babies. This pheromone has a soothing, calming effect on dogs of all ages and has been shown in multiple studies to decrease the signs of fear and anxiety under a variety of different circumstances. It specifically may help reduce or eliminate vocalizing, house soiling and destruction. ADAPTIL® comes in a collar, diffuser or spray. Speak with your veterinarian about which one will be best for your dog.

STEP 2

Video your dog when left alone to monitor their behavior when left alone. Do this a couple of days after every addition, or change, of medication and weekly to monitor progress.

If the video of your dog shows not only panting and pacing but also attempting to escape, or panicking and destroying objects in your home, or eliminating, then your dog may need additional help. Your veterinarian may recommend the addition of calming nutraceuticals and/or prescription medications to your pet's treatment plan.

Remember, just because your dog seems less anxious or has quit being destructive does not mean that your dog is "OK." If your dog continues to experience even mild anxiety in your absence, this anxiety will worsen and eventually you will see the more severe signs again. Use video to confirm that you have found the right combination of pheromones, nutraceuticals and medication (if necessary) to keep your dog relaxed and calm while home alone. This way, your dog may eventually learn that being home alone is OK because they do not feel distressed. A time may come when your veterinarian may be able to wean them off of medications.

STEP 3

Always leave your dog with some type of very special, long-lasting treat or food puzzle that is safe and appropriate for his size and ideally is something that the dog only gets when left alone. Stuffed KONG®s, Squirrel Dudes™, or Twist 'n Treats™ are all examples of good choices. If your dog does not eat the treat while you are gone, that is an excellent sign that your dog was not relaxed!

STEP 4

Be sure to make your arrivals and departures very "low key" and unexciting. You do not want to get your dog very excited about your leaving and then leave them in that state of high arousal. And you certainly do not want them to associate your presence with a lot of excitement and pleasurable activity that poses a stark contrast to your being gone, i.e. everything is now dull and boring. You want your dog to learn that being alone is great because every time, he gets this very special treat!

STEP 5

Start rewarding your dog every time you catch him being calm and relaxed! The moment your dog lies down calmly, reward him with a "good dog!" and a tiny treat. If your dog typically follows you everywhere throughout your house, begin rewarding him for lying down and staying on his bed for a few seconds at a time, first while you get up and act as if you are going to leave the room and then as you leave the room for a second. Always return and reward your dog with a tiny treat for staying.

The most important thing you can do is to always remember to reward the behaviors you like! In this case; calm and relaxed. Every time you see your dog lying quietly, reward him. Eventually, the dog learns that calm relaxed, behavior is more reinforcing than anxious stressed behaviors. Follow-up is very important in the management of separation anxiety. Regular updates to your veterinarian are vital.