



# Is Your Dog Stressed?

We often label our dog words such as hyperactive, disobedient, spiteful and fearful when in actual fact they are stressed! Stress is one of the most common mis-diagnosed ailments affecting dogs today. Just as a human acts uncharacteristically when stressed, so to do our dogs.

Factors that may cause stress to a dog:

**🐾 Inadequate Diet**

All dogs need a good quality diet. By feeding our dogs the correct amount of good food we can prevent disease and help our dogs to live happier, healthier lives. As with humans, our dog's diet needs to provide vitamins and minerals essential for dog health. If in doubt, ask your veterinarian!



**🐾 Inadequate Leadership**

Leadership is one of the most common misunderstood aspects of dog ownership! By providing your dog with good leadership you are setting your dog's life up to be stress free. Your dog need not worry about anything since you have it all under control. Be a kind and benevolent leader and do not rule by brute force. You should motivate your dog to WANT to follow you. With proper and consistent leadership your dog will know where it stands in every situation, thereby reducing stress.

**🐾 Little or no exercise**

Just as exercise reduces stress in humans the same is true for our canine companions. Dogs need physical AND mental exercise. Without the stimulation of regular exercise our dogs quickly go stir-crazy and find ways to amuse themselves. This may take the form of digging, pulling washing off the line, destructive chewing etc. This exacerbates stress because we get angry with our dogs for ruining our possessions.

**🐾 Little or no interaction with the family**

It's no secret that our dogs are social animals and that they prefer to spend their time close to us. Imagine then how stressful it is for our dogs to spend up to 23 hours a day alone in a backyard with little or no interaction with anyone and virtually nothing to keep them occupied. Unfortunately this is the way many dogs spend their lives. Is it any wonder that they then vocalise their stress through barking?

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## **Pain or Medical Conditions**

If you have ever experienced a painful medical condition you will understand how pain can affect our dogs. It is often very difficult to diagnose medical conditions in our dogs because it is in their nature to hide illness from the rest of the pack to avoid appearing weakened. If you suspect your dog is in pain take it to the vet immediately, don't wait to see if the situation worsens. Many dogs have bitten someone simply due to pain. In order to keep your dog behaviourally healthy it is necessary to also keep them physically healthy.

## **Fleas or Itchy Skin Conditions**

Fleas and itchy skin can drive a dog CRAZY! Anyone who has ever has a skin rash understands how this can happen. Ever had anyone tell you to stop scratching an itchy spot, impossible isn't it? Dogs, like humans can suffer from a variety of allergies. Ensure you provide regular flea treatments to your dog. Also, regular grooming can help keep your dog's skin in good condition. If you suspect your dog has a rash take it to the vet immediately before it spreads.

## **The arrival of a baby**

Before the arrival of a baby many dogs ARE the baby of the family. As soon as the baby arrives many people abruptly cease giving their dog so much attention. The dog's life is often turned upside down. Indoor dogs are often relegated to outdoors and parents get panicky when the dog investigates the baby. While this is understandable under the circumstances it is far better to prepare the dog for receiving less attention BEFORE the baby arrives. This way the dog will not associate the arrival of the baby with the drop-off in attention and can adapt more readily.

## **Divorce**

Divorce is stressful for everyone, including the family dog. Unfortunately many people neglect the dog during the whole process. Other people use the dog as a pawn against the other spouse. Remember that your dog is part of your family and deserves the same consideration afforded to other family members. Before making a purely emotional decision on who the dog will live with consider the dogs needs for exercise, companionship, love and affection.

## **Moving home**

Moving home is tough enough on humans but can be more stressful for our canine companions since they have no clue about what is going on. All they know is that you are stressed and the house is being packed up by strangers. Often their routine changes dramatically before and after a move – walks stop, feed times change etc, adding to the stress. Dogs need a little extra TLC at moving time to help make the transition as smooth as possible.

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- 🐾 Changes to the home (Changes in work schedules, feed times etc)**  
Dogs are creatures of habit and enjoy routine in their lives. This makes their life easy and practicable. After many months or years of a consistent timetable (e.g. wake up time, play time, walk time, feed time, sleep time) and they become very accustomed to it. Any changes to this routine can cause a great deal of stress. A change in regular routine can be particularly stressful for an older dog who finds it harder to adapt.
- 🐾 Stress within the home (Arguments etc)**  
Ever had an argument with your spouse and noticed your dog acting strangely? Arguments between family members can have a huge impact on the family dog. Dogs become very stressed, especially since they don't know why you're fighting they just know that you are attacking one another. Different dogs may react differently – the shy dog may cower in a corner somewhere, another may try to spilt you up (common among dog-dog interactions), while another may become aggressive at the perceived aggressor. Be aware of how your arguments are affecting your dog.
- 🐾 The arrival of another dog to the home**  
Many people try to reduce stress in their dogs by getting them a 'playmate'. Often the effect can sometimes be quite the opposite. Consider first that it is you that your dog is bonded to and getting another will reduce time you spend with your original dog. Also, not all dogs enjoy the constant company of other dogs. If your current pet is not physically and behaviourally healthy then bringing home another dog can be a bad idea.
- 🐾 The presence of another stressed dog in the neighbourhood**  
Dogs are a very social species that enjoy being around their own kind. Often when can hear another dog but can't interact with it frustration sets in and frustration barking begins. Also consider the effect of the noise that incessantly barking neighbourhood dog has on our dog. Dogs have better hearing than humans so the impact on our dog is greater than the impact on humans.



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