

By Amy Snow
and Nancy Zidonis

IS YOUR DOG OVERLY ANXIOUS? ACUPRESSURE CAN HELP!

Occasional anxiety is natural and normal in any dog, just as it is in us. But if your dog seems excessively anxious and fearful, you need to address the problem before it gets out of hand. Here's how acupressure, combined with other therapies, can help.

Anxiety is an important emotion in our dogs. This may sound counterintuitive, but anxiety is actually a healthy protective mechanism, an anticipatory response to a perceived threat to the dog's survival. Problems only arise when the dog is overly anxious or not anxious enough. Either extreme is harmful, and can be potentially destructive. Acupressure is an effective way to calm a dog who's on the too-anxious end of the scale.

In a normal situation, a dog may react fearfully to a loud noise, too many dogs at the park, or the sudden appearance of a stranger at the door. These reactions are to be expected — if they are short-lived. When fear is triggered, the dog's anxiety level elevates, and it's reasonable for him to react defensively in that moment. Usually, the dog then recognizes the situation is not life-threatening, and he is able to calm down fairly quickly.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF ANXIETY

Sometimes, however, dogs experience excessive anxiety. Generally, this is because of extreme fear, separation from a key person or other animal, and aging, all of which can lead to chronic and often debilitating anxiety.

It's important to understand that dogs don't exhibit anxious behavior because they're being willful or vengeful. These

are not canine emotions. So we have to be careful not to interpret a dog's anxiety as a punitive action aimed at us.

Fear-based anxiety

This type of anxiety arises from deep-seated long-term fears. Thunder-phobic dogs can feel the pressure changes in the atmosphere and begin to salivate and hide long before the noise begins. Being in a car can feel terribly unpredictable to some dogs, and they can respond in many unpleasant ways, such as shaking, urinating, defecating or regurgitating. Some dogs become aggressive when they fear their lives are at stake.

Separation anxiety

Separation anxiety affects about 14% of dogs. Our canine companions are evolutionarily hardwired to be part of a pack. Being alone can be scary because they don't have the protection and guidance of the pack. Most domesticated dogs have found ways to cope with their "pack" walking out the door and leaving them at home alone, but they are probably feeling some level of anxiety while their people are away.

A dog experiencing separation anxiety can be a desperate animal. In his distress, he can destroy furniture, chew through a door, howl for hours on end, defecate, urinate, and even

become self-destructive. In other words, a dog with extreme separation anxiety can lose all sense of control and may be pretty close to losing his sense of survival.

Age-related anxiety

Elderly dogs can experience cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS), which causes a decline in basic faculties such as memory, learning and awareness, just as in humans. When an older dog becomes confused, it can lead to anxiety.

HOW TO HELP YOUR DOG

As loving dog guardians, we naturally find it upsetting when our dogs are overly anxious. Fortunately, there are many ways to help a dog work through his anxiety disorder.

Your holistic veterinarian is the best place to start. He or she can make sure your dog is not suffering from a physical injury or disease that may account for his heightened anxiety. Once health issues are ruled out, your vet may direct you toward an integrative approach to helping your dog. Working with a canine behaviorist and/or trainer (see sidebar at right), along with using complementary therapies — such as acupressure — are shown to have a positive outcome.

ACUPRESSURE FOR ANXIETY

Whichever strategies you pursue to resolve your dog's anxiety, regular acupressure sessions support the entire process. The acupressure points used in these sessions (shown in the chart accompanying this article) are known to reduce anxiety, clear the mind, and enhance the bond between you and your dog.

When working on the trunk of your dog's body, gently place the soft tip of your thumb on the acupressure points. When stimulating the points on his extremities, you can use the soft tip of your pointer finger. Place your other hand comfortably on his body. Stay on each acupressure point for a slow count of 20. Repeat this procedure on the opposite side of your dog.

By offering this acupressure session to your dog two times a week you can help alleviate or prevent excessive anxiety, and improve his quality of life — and maybe yours too!

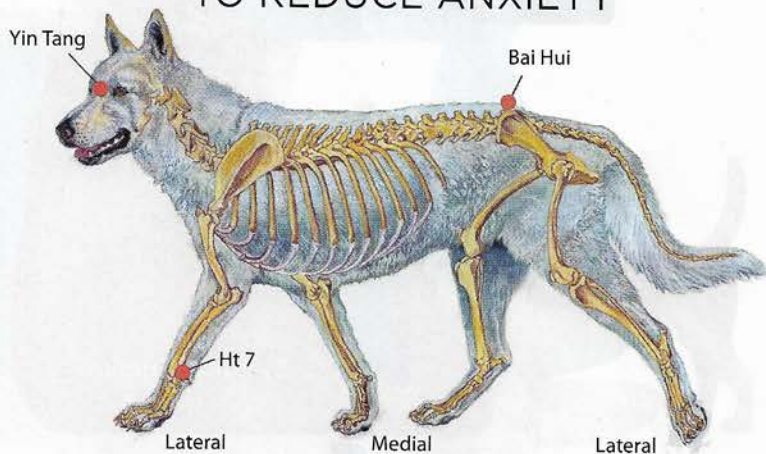
Canine behaviorists and trainers

Qualified canine behaviorists and trainers can guide you through counterconditioning and/or desensitization techniques for your dog.

- Counterconditioning entails replacing your dog's anxious reaction to a fearful trigger with a positive response. Redirecting a dog's attention with a treat can be effective.
- Desensitization requires consistently exposing the dog to the anxiety trigger in small doses until he no longer fears it.

Additionally, behaviorists and trainers can help you understand your dog's body language so you are aware when he is becoming anxious. This way, you can avoid the stimuli that trigger his anxiety, especially while you're working on reducing his fears.

ACUPOINTS TO REDUCE ANXIETY



POINTS	LOCATION
Ht 7	Located on the outside of the foreleg, in the deep crease of the carpal joint.
Yin Tang	Found on the dorsal midline between and slightly above the midpoint of the eyes.
Bai Hui	Found on dorsal midline at the lumbosacral space.

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Preventing excessive anxiety

Dealing with potential anxiety problems before they get a chance to take root in your dog's psyche is important. Early and proper socialization, obedience training, exercise, healthy nutrition, and consistent bodywork (including acupressure!) are all essential to a happy dog who can adapt to surprises and unknown situations, such as scary trips to the vet or a major change in the household.