

# How to help your anxious or fearful dog

Did you know that fear and anxiety is very common in dogs? In fact, the PDSA's 2015 PAW Report found that just 20% of dog owners think that their pet is 'not afraid of anything'. Thankfully though, there's a lot you can do to help anxious or stressed dogs feel happier and more confident. In this article we take a look at common triggers, plus ways to help affected dogs.



## DID YOU KNOW?



Dogs – like people – are individuals, each with their own genetic make-up, early life experiences, behavioural and emotional responses towards the very human world around them.



# SO LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT WHAT'S WORRYING THE UK DOG POPULATION...

## TRAVELLING AND HOLIDAYS

**23%**  
of dogs are anxious or fearful of car travel.<sup>3</sup>

## BEING LEFT ALONE

**30%**  
Show obvious signs of anxiousness when home alone.<sup>1</sup>

**80%**  
could be suffering in silence.<sup>6</sup>

## VISITS TO THE VETS, GROOMERS OR KENNELS

**78.5%**  
dogs demonstrated fearful behaviour on the examination table; less than 50% were calm when entering the practice.<sup>2</sup>

**7%**  
are worried about groomers.

## NEW SITUATIONS OR OBJECTS

Puppies and dogs who don't receive appropriate 'habituation' to different situations and objects, can develop what behaviourists call "neophobia".<sup>5</sup>

## FAMILIAR PEOPLE

**13%**  
respond negatively to family members.<sup>1</sup>

## OTHER DOGS

**47%**  
react to other dogs out on walks.<sup>1</sup>

**15%**  
show aggression towards familiar dogs in the same household.<sup>1</sup>

## LOUD NOISES

**45%**  
are scared of fireworks and other loud noises.<sup>4</sup>

## UNFAMILIAR PEOPLE

**80%**  
show an undesirable response to strangers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blackwell, E. J., Twells, C., Seawright, A. & Casey, R. A. (2008). The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behaviour problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs. *Journal of Veterinary Behaviour*, 3, 207-217.

<sup>2</sup> PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report 2015, pg. 27 – <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/get-involved/our-current-campaigns/pdsa-animal-wellbeing-report>

<sup>3</sup> Mills, D. S. & Mills, C. B. (2003). A survey of the behaviour of UK household dogs. *Proceedings of the 4th International Veterinary Behaviour Meeting*, Proceedings Number 352, August 18-20, 203. Eds K Seksel, G. Perry, D. Mills, D. Frank, E. Lindell, P. McGreevy, P. Pageat. Sydney, University of Sydney Post-Graduate Foundation in Veterinary Science, pp 93-98.

<sup>4</sup> Blackwell, E. J., Bradshaw, J. W. D. & Casey, R. A. (2013). Fear responses to noises in domestic dogs: Prevalence, risk factors and co-occurrence with other fear related behaviour. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 145, 15-25.

<sup>5</sup> Pluijmakers, J. T. M., Appleby, D. L. & Bradshaw, J. W. S. (2010). Exposure to video images between 3 and 5 weeks of age decreased Neophobia in domestic dogs. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 126, 51-58.

<sup>6</sup> <https://behaviourvet.wordpress.com/2013/10/14/left-home-alone-a-welfare-issue-for-dogs/>

# HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR ANXIOUS DOG?

Given the broad range of doggie fears – and the different ways that dogs respond – perhaps it's unsurprising that there's no one-size-fits-all solution to help your fearful or anxious dog feel better. Instead, it's all about finding the best approach that includes canine behavioural therapy treatment that works to help both of you move forwards and enjoy more out of life together.

## 1. IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF YOUR DOG'S FEAR

Knowing your dog's signs of fear and identifying their triggers can really help. As you learn to understand your dog's body language, recognising the specific triggers that cause them fear or anxiety will put you in the position to be able to do something about it.

**Look out** for the less obvious signs and don't ignore those that seem less frequent or significant, as they can be an early warning that your dog needs extra support before things become more serious or ingrained.



## 2. SHORT-TERM MANAGEMENT

Avoid any triggers as far as possible to lower your dog's feelings of stress. This will make it possible to implement a behavioural therapy programme as your dog is less worried and more receptive. Exposure to what your dog finds scary can ruin the chances of helping them at their own pace – imagine a person who is scared of spiders trapped in a room surrounded by them – it will be almost impossible for them to control their emotions and behavioural responses when they are not ready!

Be sure to avoid any kind of punishment. We know that it's sometimes upsetting or frustrating when your dog displays difficult coping behaviours like destructive behaviour, barking, lunging, growling or toileting inappropriately, but it's so important that they are not punished. This can make them even more stressed and deepen their fears, and cause even more extreme behavioural reactions.



## 3. RULE OUT ANY UNDERLYING MEDICAL CONDITION

Once you've recognised that there is something worrying your dog, get to the vets – they'll be able to check that everything's OK medically. If behaviour suddenly changes, it can be a sign that something's not quite right, or that your dog is in pain. Your vet can also spot if they have a hormone imbalance, or need a change in diet or routine.



## 4. SEEK PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOURAL ADVICE TO COME UP WITH A PLAN

Clinical Animal Behaviourists provide advice and behavioural therapy programmes for pets and their owners. As well as helping you understand what's happening inside your dog's mind, they can advise on how best to manage and change the situation to help prevent early fear and anxiety responses becoming engrained behaviours. They can also work with dogs (and owners) who are really struggling, providing deeper support strategies where your dog has more established problems.

In most cases, triggers are part of everyday life, so you'll need to work on a plan to help support your dog to feel better and overcome their fears. **Your behaviourist is the best person to help you put together a strategy, which might include:**

- ✓ **Natural calming supplements** – like YuCALM Dog
- ✓ **Desensitisation and counter-conditioning techniques** – see the doggie dictionary at <http://www.lintbells.com/blog/dictionary/>
- ✓ **Medication to relieve anxiety** – for example, anti-depressants for dogs, if advised by your vet or behaviourist
- ✓ **Having fun with play, reward-based training games and exercise** – to help release feel-good hormones and calm anxiety.

Lintbells recommends using a fully Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist to make sure you see someone with the right skills, knowledge and experience – inappropriate or out-of-date advice can do more harm than good to your dog's behaviour and welfare.



## HOW DOES YuCALM® Dog WORK AS PART OF A SUPPORT STRATEGY?

YuCALM Dog's natural scientifically proven ingredients help your dog cope with stress. It's ideal for pets who are fearful of fireworks, other dogs, strangers and other triggers – and can help your dog work on changing feelings and responses to triggers of fear and anxiety. You can learn more on the [YuCALM Dog page](#), but in a nutshell, it works by making your dog feel calmer, so they become more receptive to behaviour therapy techniques, which lead in time to a happier, more playful and confident dog.



### STAGE 1 SHORT-TERM MANAGEMENT

YuCALM Dog works to help your dog feel calm. It's safe, natural, and a great way to help your dog cope with triggers. It can be an ideal first step towards rehabilitation, when used alongside advice from your vet practice or a Clinical Animal Behaviourist to make environmental changes to help reduce stress.



### STAGE 2 SUPPORT THEM TO FEEL BETTER

Working with a behaviourist, get started on behaviour therapy techniques, like **desensitisation** and **counter-conditioning**. YuCALM Dog can help your dog be more receptive to this thanks to its instant calming action. YuCALM Dog also supports training by affecting the dopamine and serotonin pathways, helping your dog feel happier and more playful as they learn new behavioural responses and experience more positive emotions. This can increase confidence and improves results.

### STAGE 3 ONGOING IMPROVEMENT

With positivity, commitment, consistency and a helping hand from YuCALM Dog, you'll start to see a real improvement, as your dog becomes reassured and feels better in situations that have caused fear or anxiety. Your relationship should move forward together – your dog will be able to enjoy more of life, as calmer emotional and behavioural responses are positively reinforced.

## INTERESTED IN FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT YuCALM Dog?

Take a look at the [YuCALM Dog page](#) – there's lots of useful information about exactly how this all-natural supplement can be used long-term to set your dog free from feelings of fearfulness and anxiety.

