

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT DURING VETERINARY VISITS



Why Some Dogs Need Additional Support During Veterinary Visits

Some dogs experience significant fear, anxiety, stress, or discomfort during veterinary examinations. For these dogs, routine handling may become overwhelming and can result in defensive behaviors such as struggling, vocalizing, attempting to flee, growling, or biting.

In these cases, pre-visit medications and/or sedation may be recommended to help ensure a safer, less stressful experience for your dog, veterinary staff, and caregivers.

Needing medication or sedation for veterinary care is not uncommon and does not mean your dog is untrainable. It is often an important tool that allows medical care to be performed with less fear and distress.

Signs Your Dog May Benefit from Pre-Medication or Sedation

Your dog may be a candidate for pre-visit medication or sedation if they:

- Become highly fearful or anxious during veterinary visits
- Resist handling, restraint, or examinations
- Have a history of growling, snapping, or biting
- Cannot be safely examined despite low-stress handling techniques
- Require procedures that would otherwise be too stressful to complete
- Have experienced previous traumatic veterinary visits
- Show severe stress responses such as trembling, panting, freezing, excessive vocalization

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Creating a Plan With Your Veterinarian

If your dog struggles with veterinary visits, it is important to discuss this with your veterinary team before the appointment.

- **Topics to discuss include:**
 - Your dog's behavioral history
 - Previous experiences at veterinary clinics
 - Triggers that increase fear or stress
 - Successful handling techniques used at home
 - Whether pre-visit medications may be appropriate
 - Whether sedation should be planned in advance for specific procedures
 - Fear Free techniques to help improve your dogs experience over time (utilizing treats, enrichment, modified handling techniques or choice based handling techniques)
 - Whenever possible, contact your veterinary team several days before the appointment to discuss concerns and create a plan rather than waiting until arrival
- **Information that can be helpful to share:**
 - Videos of handling concerns
 - Details about previous veterinary visits
 - Known fears or triggers
 - Favorite treats or reinforcers
 - Equipment your dog is comfortable wearing (muzzle, harness, etc.)
 - Link to find fear free vets in your area: <https://directory.fearfree.com/>

Muzzle Training: A Valuable Safety Tool

For dogs who may react defensively during handling, muzzle training can greatly improve safety and reduce stress **A properly conditioned muzzle should:**

- Be introduced gradually and positively
- Allow the dog to pant, drink, and take treats
- Never be used as punishment
- Be associated with rewards and positive experiences
- More muzzle training resources: <http://muzzleupproject.com/>

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Home Veterinary Visits

Some dogs are more comfortable receiving care in their home environment. **Depending on your location, mobile veterinary services may be available for:**

- Wellness exams
- Vaccinations
- Routine bloodwork
- Quality-of-life assessments
- Behavioral consultations

For highly fearful or anxious dogs, home visits may reduce stress associated with transportation, waiting rooms, unfamiliar people, and unfamiliar environments.

Bringing a Trusted Support Person

Many dogs feel more comfortable when accompanied by a familiar person. **If approved by your veterinary team, a trusted caregiver may be able to:**

- Assist with cooperative care techniques
- Deliver treats and reinforcement
- Help position the dog comfortably
- Support handling exercises the dog already knows
- Provide emotional comfort during procedures

Always follow the veterinary team's instructions regarding safety and handling.

