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Motion sickness

Some of you have experienced the unpleasant duty of cleaning up after your pet has been sick in the car. Motion sickness is a very common disorder in dogs and also seen in cats.

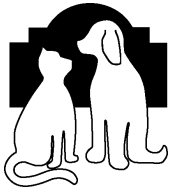
Motion sickness in pets is similar to that of people. Motion sickness is frequently due to driving, but flying and boating can also cause of motion sickness. It is caused by a nervous stimulation to the inner ear (called the vestibular system) which affects balance. When the vestibular system is activated it causes nausea and dizziness. This can lead to symptoms of drooling and vomiting. But the big debate is whether is your pet's motion sickness caused purely by a neurological stimulation of the inner ear, or is stress the cause. There is certainly evidence of stress, especially if your pets only exposure to the car is driving to the vet office (which is certainly stressful although we make it as least stressful as possible.)

Mostly likely both factors play a role in causing motion sickness but my belief is that anxiety or stress plays a bigger part than it does in people. Because of the two types of causes, the treatments are different.

For classical motion sickness (the non-anxiety cause) medications are very helpful. We use medications such as diphenhydramine (Benedryl), dimenhydrinate (Dramamine), and meclizine (Antivert) to treat the symptoms. These are all available without a prescription but should NEVER be given to your pet without veterinary approval as the dosage is quite different in pets than people and they can react to other medications or medical conditions. These medications can help anxiety-induced motion sickness as well due to their sedative effects.

Dogs and cats with anxiety (stress/fear) induced motion sickness can experience vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, and drooling. The previously mentioned medications can help, but usually don't eliminate the symptoms. Generally behavioral modification training is the best approach. This means that you eliminate the anxiety and therefore eliminate the symptoms. Medications such as a sedative like acepromazine can be used to help with this modification.

Behavioral modification is a means to "desensitize" and "counter condtion" them from the stress of car trips. Ideally, this should start when they are puppies/kittens, but any dog or cat can be trained.. Take them in the car for short trips, such as around the block. Do this often. Slowly

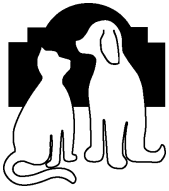


increase the duration. To avoid a mess, don't feed them for about an hour before the trip. If you are using a carrier, make sure that it is well ventilated and comfortable. Make sure your pet can turn around easily within the carrier. Putting in an item with a comfortable, familiar scent may help as well. It is very important that their first few visits aren't just to the hospital, as this adds anxiety.

Sometimes the anxiety in dogs is due to a loss of feeling of control. This is especially common in dominant dogs. To help with the anxiety, before any car rides are done, you must become the dominant. This is a praise based approach by teaching the basic sit and stay commands followed by praise. Once the dog is good with the commands, make them sit/stay before getting anything positive such as petting, walking, feeding, treats, or attention. If the dog tries to get your attention, ignore it. It is very important to reward the appropriate behavior with lots of praise. Once done, try the following steps, repeating each one several times over several days. Sink or swim approaches rarely work...patience will be required. The whole process should occur over several weeks.

- Once trained, have your dog go in the car and do a sit/stay with praise with the car door open and the car off. Let them stay for a few minutes, then leave the car.
- Repeat it with the door closed-with you inside. Continue the praise.
- Now continue with the engine on but not moving. Leave the engine on for several minutes.
- Now start driving short distances. Slowly increase the time and distance.
- It is very important for the owner to be calm and relaxed, as your agitation will increase your dogs anxiety-never punish.
- Remember never reward anxious dogs with treats or praise. Even saying, "it's okay" is a form of reward.
- If your pet displays any form of anxiety, go back a step
- If this doesn't work, medication maybe required

If your pet has problems with motion sickness, it is best to consult with your veterinarian.



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Other problems could be causing the problem and an examination should be performed before starting any medication. Certain medications can also make your pet prone to hyperthermia (overheating) and caution is advised.

By the way...drive with your car windows open just enough for fresh air. Do not let your dog stick his/her head out the window, as foreign matter can cause severe corneal (eye) damage. Also, they could escape. If in a truck, make sure the dog is well secured.