



Turning Vet Visits into a Positive

We all know that for some dogs, coming to the vet is not their favourite activity, but with these tips we may help to change that for patients! The suggestions below outline some things clients can do to help reduce their dog's anxiety level and negative associations to the clinic.

Happy Visits

For many dogs, the anxiety they feel at the veterinary clinic stems from a negative association that they have formed. This makes sense as most dogs only come to the vet when something is wrong, or they are due for vaccinations. Because of this these dogs have come to associate the vet with experiences they view as negative such as nail trims, ear cleanings, vaccinations and blood draws. Over time this experience becomes rooted in their brain and they become anxious when coming to the clinic even if nothing is being done to them at that time.

Thankfully, this process can be offset to create a more positive emotional response. To do this we just need to start creating positive experiences at the vet and with the cooperation of dedicated owners one way to do this is to encourage them to bring their dog in for "Happy Visits." Happy Visits are visits to the clinic where only

good things will happen, the dog is provided with treats and cookies, or a food filled KONG, incorporated with some nice attention from staff. This requires having high value food items on hand, and owners can be encouraged to bring their dog's favourite chew toy or play toy. Over time, having these positive experiences help counterweigh some of the negative associations a dog has made in the past. Many dogs may even end up loving the clinic! Happy visits don't have to be long or complicated, they can vary from a simple drop in to eat a few treats to longer periods allowing the dog to relax.

Puppies who attend vet run Puppy School classes have the added benefit of establishing a different relationship with the vet practice early on and can associate it with a place of play and treats.

Food for the Win!

For many dogs, the way to their heart is truly through their stomach! Skipping a meal on the day they are coming to the vet means the dog will be hungrier and therefore more willing to accept treats from the staff. If they are willing to accept treats at the clinic they will enjoy their visits more, be distracted from their exam or procedures and will form more positive associations. Provided a dog doesn't have underlying resources guarding concerns an owner can even hold a food stuffed KONG for the dog to enjoy throughout an examination.



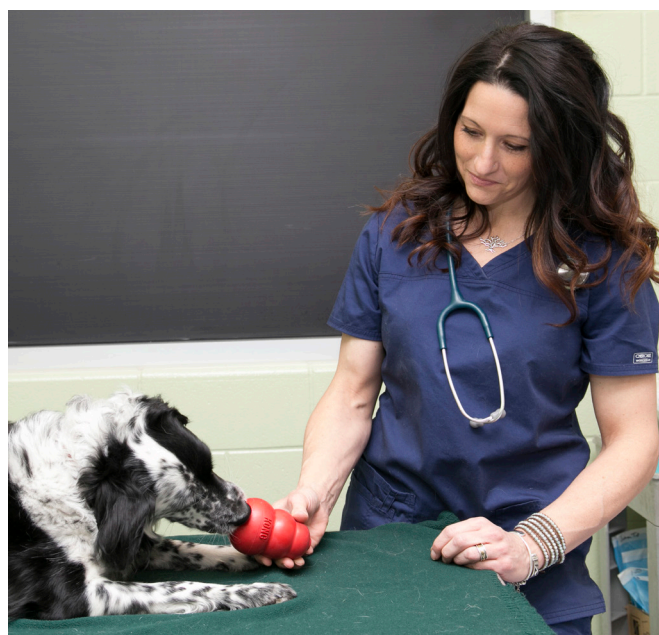
Giving Clients Homework

For a lot of dogs, the basic things involved in an exam, even a routine one, can seem scary not because they are painful, but because they are out of the ordinary for them. For most pets, their daily routine does not include having their feet handled, or having someone look in their ears or eyes. When they come to the vet their bodies are handled in ways, they are not familiar with, and they may be receiving injections, having their nails trimmed or even having blood drawn. Even though the veterinary staff are as gentle as possible these things can be scary just because they are so unusual for a dog.



One way to help make this process easier is to advise owners to practice some of these things at home. This desensitizing process should be done routinely with all puppies, as it will make them less likely to develop anxiety being handled but this can also be done in older dogs to help reverse some of the fears they have developed.

Desensitizing a dog to a physical exam doesn't ever need to be painful or scary! Simply it requires a few minutes every day to perform a mock "examination". Running hands over the dog's entire body, touching gently each leg and foot, taking a peek in each ear, lifting the lip to look at the teeth. A retractable ball point pen can be gently pressed against the body to simulate a vaccine. Practicing a little restraint with the dog by giving him a hug around his neck. Each time a different part of the body is handled advise owners to offer praise and a treat – keeping the process fun! If the dog displays any signs of anxiety, back up and do a little less, with more praise and treats.



For anxious dogs, the waiting room can be a very confronting place! It can be busy and loud and full of other animals. If an anxious dog has to sit and wait in the lobby they may get progressively more worked up and this will make their exam more difficult for them. If a dog demonstrates anxiety, it is a much better option to encourage them to wait in the car, or outside in a garden if it's an option until the Vet is ready to see them.

Taking a nervous dog to the vet can be anxiety-inducing for everyone. With a little bit of dedication and a lot of treats they may become a little more enjoyable for everyone involved.

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