

Using Trazodone For Your Dog's Anxiety

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You know the routine. You get up in the morning, walk and feed your dog and go about getting ready to head to work. Meanwhile, your best friend is pacing the floors, whimpering, and generally acting like something terrible is about to happen. To them, something terrible will happen: you will leave the house, setting up a bout of behavior that ranges from barking and howling, urinating and defecating, to tearing up the house or, in extreme cases, chewing through walls or jumping from windows. In such cases your dog may benefit from a separation anxiety assessment and possibly treatment with medication.

Anxiety and Medication

The decision to administer psychoactive medications to your dog should never be taken lightly, but on the other hand, it can keep your dog comfortable, and keep you sane. Separation anxiety, as described in the above scenario, is just one type of anxiety-based behavior disorder that your pet may exhibit. Your pet may show anxiety during thunderstorms or when there are loud noises such as fireworks displays or backfiring automobiles, or he may become anxious or even aggressive during veterinary visits.

It's uncertain what causes separation anxiety but it is exhibited frequently by dogs in shelter environments, suggesting that it can result from the loss of an important person or people in a dog's life. Other possible contributing causes include a change of schedule or change of residence.

Anxiety is an uncomfortable sensation, arising partially from an inability to control something. Humans know and understand anxiety and it's much more than just not 'feeling right.' Try to imagine a situation that is so stressful that your dog would chew on metal bars all day or chew through drywall to try to escape. That kind of behavioral distress is not just a bad feeling, it's the equivalent of a painful physical condition in many ways. If not treated your dog's immune system can work less effectively, leaving them easier targets for viruses, bacteria, or parasites they may encounter in the environment. Like humans, pets may become chronically depressed and behavioral problems can also become chronic issues.

Trazodone

Trazodone is a serotonin receptor antagonist and re-uptake inhibitor (SARI) that is a human medication that is legally prescribed off-label by veterinarians. It's very safe and has been shown to be effective through use by veterinarians and veterinary behavior specialists. Because of its general safety, it has a wide dosage range, meaning that it can be used daily or as often as every eight hours. Just as in humans, some dogs react more strongly to trazodone than others, so it's important for the prescribing veterinarian to adjust the dosage based on your pet's reaction.

With more generalized anxiety, trazodone will likely be prescribed daily in order to manage the issue. When the event that triggers anxiety can be predicted, as in fireworks, thunderstorms, or the owner leaving the house, trazodone can also be used on an as-needed basis.

Side effects

Common side effects include vomiting and diarrhea, sedation, and panting. Some dogs will become excited or agitated on the drug, in which case it should be discontinued. A much less common side effect is serotonin syndrome, which frequently manifests as shivering, tremors, and ataxia. Symptoms generally subside once the drug is withdrawn and supportive treatment of symptoms is started.

When and Why to Use Trazodone

Trazodone is also used as a sedative for lengthy car rides or periods where the pet must be rested while recuperating from injury or surgery. It can be invaluable when administered a couple of hours before a vet visit with an anxious dog. Some dogs simply 'flip out' at the veterinarian's office and cannot be examined, either because they become aggressive or simply make it impossible to be restrained for exam or treatment.

If your pet has moderate to severe separation or other anxiety based behavioral issues, it is recommended that you discuss the use of trazodone with your veterinarian. If your pet is stressed by vet visits, and you ignore it, their behavior may become progressively worse with each visit, until anesthetic restraint (sedation) must be administered. It's better and less stressful for your dog to administer trazodone at home before the visit, helping to keep him calm and get the best vet treatment possible.

It would be nice if every dog could be free of fear and anxiety, and as pet owners it is certainly our wish for them. But when anxiety becomes uncontrollable and uncomfortable, a safe, easily administered sedative is the most humane treatment to help deal with this issue.