**Helping Pets with Anxiety**

Can [pets](http://www.examiner.com/pets) get [anxiety](http://www.examiner.com/topic/anxiety)?

The answer is yes. Sadly, anxiety is treated in pets more commonly than one might expect.

Symptoms:

* Restlessness
* Panting
* Destructive behaviors
* Impaired digestive disorders such as:
* Diarrhea
* Vomiting
* Regurgitation
* Constipation

When an animal (even human) is anxious, the [stress](http://www.examiner.com/topic/stress) responses of the body are in overdrive. **Cortisol**, the “stress hormone,” is produced in overdramatic amounts that make it harder for an animal to learn tasks or have regular, clear, cognitive function. The body is in constant fight-or flight mode. During this time the body is not tending to maintenance and repair, or “clean up” functions as well as it should. Normally a healthy body can intercept mutations occurring in cell reproduction. But if a body is stressed, the ability to do this can also be hampered, making it easier to succumb to development of cancerous changes in the body.

Contributors of stress include:

* City living (traffic, sirens, fireworks)
* Lack of exercise
* Constant stimulation
* Lack of a “job”
* Obesity or inappropriate nutrition
* Stiffness or pain

Why do pets get stressed? City living can be stressful for anyone. Factor in a dog’s athletic or sporting nature and natural need for long runs and plenty of exercise, and a good portion of the culprit can be curtailed by merely providing for this level of activity. When allowed to have plenty of outdoor activity, the physical benefits are supported by mental stimulation as well. All the smells and sounds of other animals and plants can be really good for animals. However, too much stimulation in the sense of traffic noises, sirens, or too dense of concentration of animals and people can be stressful. In other words, dogs and cats need their exercise and time outside if possible. However, they need at least some of their own space, where they are not constantly inundated with other animals or people.

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Decreasing Stress:

* “Nose work” classes
* Interactive play time such as hide-and-seek
* Behavior training and conditioning
* Rest; down time
* Holistic modalities and frequent tune-ups

[Behavior](http://www.examiner.com/topic/behavior) training and interactive play times are essential for communicating clearly and effectively to pets what it is that is expected of them to cohabitate peacefully in our homes. Dogs in particular enjoy having a “job,” which can diminish anxiety as well as provide physical exercise.

Like exercise, rest and sleep are also critical for averting anxiety. Sleep time should be quiet, without extraneous electronic noises such as televisions, games, or computers. Avoid gadgets with high frequency noises to avert pests, as many dogs and cats can become agitated by these.

Obesity, inappropriate diet, missing nutrients, or joint problems can all contribute to stressors on the psyche and physique. Remember that pets are evolutionarily conditioned—especially under stress—to mask or hide illness. If your pet is experiencing stress or anxiety, have your holistic veterinarian assess their health, lifestyle, diet, etc.

Acupuncture helps anxiety by reducing cortisol and increasing serotonin and other “feel good” brain hormones. Herbs, supplements and diet are also effective methods for improving the overall big picture to devise a safe, natural plan to help you and your pet live optimal, full, stress-free lives.