

# This Red Flag Practically Screams That Your Dog Is in Pain

Please don't ignore. This red flag practically screams 'pain.' But it's often misread as a psychological issue, not physical pain. Piles more stress on painful muscles or joints, causing further pain. Is this the hidden reason your pet overreacts to sounds you consider normal?

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- New research suggests dogs who develop noise sensitivity later in life should be assessed for a painful condition
- Dogs with pain-related noise sensitivity develop the condition on average four years later than other noise-phobic dogs
- These dogs also display heightened avoidance of situations in which they had a bad experience with noise, and also tend to avoid other dogs
- It's important to know the signs of pain in your dog and if you see one or more, make an appointment with your veterinarian
- It's also important to take steps to relieve your dog's noise sensitivity through behavior modification and calming techniques

**Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published June 18, 2018.**

A newly published study suggests dogs who display fear or anxiety when they hear loud or sudden noises should be assessed for pain by veterinarians.<sup>1</sup> The study authors — animal behavior scientists from Brazil and the U.K. — examined cases of dogs who developed a sensitivity to loud sounds, different pitches or sudden noises. They found that dogs with musculoskeletal pain developed a greater sensitivity to noise. According to ScienceDaily:

*"The researchers believe that pain, which could be undiagnosed, could be exacerbated when a noise makes the dogs tense up or 'start', putting extra stress on muscles or joints which are already enflamed, causing further pain. That pain is then associated with a loud or startling noise, leading to a sensitivity to noise and avoidance of situations where they had previously had a bad experience — for example a local park, or a louder room in the house."<sup>2</sup>*

## Pain-Associated Noise Sensitivity Develops Later in Life

The researchers looked at the veterinary records of 20 dogs diagnosed with noise sensitivity by clinical animal behaviorists at the University of Lincoln in the U.K. The dogs were divided into two groups: 10 who had also been diagnosed with musculoskeletal pain (hip dysplasia, arthritis and focal spondylosis), and 10 control dogs without pain.

All 20 dogs showed noise sensitivity symptoms that included trembling, shaking and hiding. However, the painful dogs showed an increased level of avoidance of places where they had a bad experience with noise. Sensitivity triggers included fireworks, thunderstorms, airplanes, gunshots, cars and motorcycles.

The study also revealed that the age of onset of noise sensitivity in the painful dogs was on average about four years later than the dogs in the control group. In addition, the dogs with diagnosed pain generalized their noise sensitivity to related environments and avoided other dogs, which didn't happen with the control dogs.

All the dogs received individual behavior modification plans that included management strategies and counterconditioning and/or desensitization to noise. Psych drugs were recommended for eight of the painful dogs and all 10 of the control dogs, and analgesics (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) were administered to the painful dogs, along with recommendations to their owners on how to reduce the risk of exacerbating pain.

According to the researchers, all the dogs except one were reported to improve with treatment. Needless to say, I try to treat both painful dogs and those with noise phobias with minimal use of pharmaceuticals. I go with a multimodal approach, starting with nontoxic therapies and opting to use drugs only with patients who need significant immediate relief, or patients who don't respond to a drug-free protocol.

## **Signs Your Dog May Be in Pain and What to Do About It**

Determining if your pet is hurting is all about picking up subtle cues. Generally speaking, a hurting dog is often a dog with a sad or tense expression. Canines don't typically whine or cry unless they're in tremendous pain, so here are some other signs to watch for:<sup>3</sup>

- Lack or loss of appetite
- Not greeting you as usual
- Trembling/shivering
- Crouching
- Not bearing weight on a leg
- Taking longer than usual to urinate or defecate
- Reluctance to climb up or down stairs
- Excessive panting

How your canine companion's pain is managed depends on what's causing it, so it's crucially important to make an appointment with your veterinarian for a thorough exam. Once your vet has evaluated your dog and depending on the root cause of his discomfort, there are a number of integrative therapies that blend nicely to reduce the amount of medications needed to manage pain, including:

- Chiropractic
- Therapeutic massage
- Helping your pet stretch
- Acupuncture
- Laser therapy

There are also some newer therapies I've used with good success, including the **Assisi Loop**, a form of pulsed electromagnetic field therapy. In addition, there are a variety of beneficial supplements you can add to your pet's diet, again depending on his diagnosis and treatment protocol.

## **Why It's so Important to Help Dogs With Noise Sensitivity**

A noise phobia in your canine family member is no laughing matter. Left untreated, the condition almost always gets worse. The development of a phobia involves a complex molecular change that isn't well understood, but seems to involve a shift in how an affected dog processes information.

Noise phobia can be inherited, so it's possible for a pup to be predisposed to the condition if dogs in his lineage have displayed overreaction to noise. In fact, the genetic connection is so direct that if one of your dog's parents overreacted to storms or other noises, you can reasonably expect your pet will have a similar response. An overreaction to loud noises can also predispose your dog to other panic disorders like separation anxiety and behavioral problems.

## **To Manage Her Noise Sensitivity, Learn What Calms Your Dog**

I recommend as a first step in dealing with your dog's noise aversion that you simply observe her during a fearful episode and see what you can do to calm her. Some suggestions:

- If your dog is crate-trained, she may go there voluntarily to self-soothe, or you can lead the way. A blanket draped over the crate may help her relax. However, if she doesn't normally use a crate, or worse, has a fear of crates due to a past bad experience, this isn't the time to use one.

Under no circumstances should a fearful pup be forced into a crate either when she's already anxious, or in anticipation of a panic response to weather or other noises. Your dog will feel trapped, which will make both her phobia and her reaction to it worse.

Alternatively, you can lead her to a quiet room in your home and either leave her alone there to self-soothe (as long as she's not frantic), or stay quietly with her. A silent, still environment can often provide relief.

Some dogs will seek out dark, quiet corners on their own where they can calm themselves, so consider providing yours with a darkened room, a closet floor, or space under a table or desk, preferably away from Wi-Fi routers and other EMFs.

The goal is to give her a secure spot that helps her calm herself. If she continues to panic in her quiet space, it isn't what she needs to help her relax. Put an earthing mat or grounding pad in your dog's safe space. This can be especially helpful during stormy weather.

- Take your dog for a brisk walk or a game of fetch before and after a stressor occurs to help combat the negative physiologic effects of stress-induced hormones.
- Play calm, soothing music (e.g., MusicMyPet.com) before a possible stressor occurs. This may both relax your dog and drown out distressing noises.
- Try putting gentle, continuous pressure on your dog to calm her. If she'll allow it, try leaning gently on or against her without petting or stroking. If this is helping, you'll feel her muscles begin to relax. If instead she

seems to grow more anxious, this isn't a technique that will be helpful for her.

If your dog seems to respond well to pressure applied to her body, there are wraps available (e.g., Thundershirt.com, TTouch anxiety wrap) that many pet parents find very helpful.

- Try Ttouch, a specific massage technique that can help anxious pets.
- Eye shades that either block all light or diffuse the light can help some dogs relax during thunderstorms. You can try a basic eye mask intended for humans or a pair of tinted Doggles. You can also try blocking the intensity of the sounds your pet hears. Ear protection for dogs is available from Mutt Muffs.
- Consult your holistic veterinarian about homeopathic, TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) and Bach Flower Remedies that could be helpful in alleviating your dog's stress. Rescue Remedy is one of many different flower essences that can help calm a tense animal. CBD oil can be very beneficial for these cases, as well.

Calming nutraceuticals and herbs that can be of benefit include holy basil, l-theanine, rhodiola, ashwagandha, GABA, 5-HTP and chamomile. If the stressor persists longer than 72 hours, adding in adrenal supportive glandulars (such as Standard Process Drenamin) can be very beneficial. Consult your holistic vet about which option is right for your pet

Place a few drops of the essential oil of lavender on a cloth by your dog's favorite hiding place before a stressor occurs, if possible, or diffuse the oil around your house for an overall calming effect. Also consider an Adaptil collar or diffuser, which contains a dog-appeasing pheromone and is designed to have a calming affect. Using zoopharmacognosy in these situations can be profoundly impactful.

One thing you never, ever want to do with a dog who's afraid of storms or other loud noises, is leave her outdoors while she's anxious or panicked. Dogs regularly run away or seriously injure themselves attempting to escape outdoor enclosures during storms, fireworks displays and other noisy events.

## Behavior Modification

In addition to learning what calms your dog, it's also critical to work to extinguish the overreaction. Behavior modification techniques such as desensitization, counter-conditioning or a combination are most often used to help anxiety-related canine conditions.

Desensitization involves exposing your dog to the noises he overreacts to. There are tapes, records, CDs and Internet sites that mimic all sorts of noises, including storms, exploding fireworks, car backfires and even gunshots. This approach works better with dogs in the beginning stages of a phobia, and not so well with dogs suffering from fully entrenched phobias.

Counter-conditioning involves rewarding your dog for not reacting, typically with a food treat that competes with his ability to react to a noise stimulus. If you feel you need help modifying your pet's fear-based behavior, I recommend consulting an animal behaviorist in your area through the **[American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](#)**.

## Sources and References

[The Bark March 2018](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Frontiers in Veterinary Science, February 13, 2018](#)

<sup>2</sup> [ScienceDaily, March 20, 2018](#)

