

Just One Dose Helped Dogs Feel Less Anxious and Sad

If your pup finds car rides or being home alone stressful, you'll want to see the results of this study. While this substance is known to alleviate stress and anxiety in humans, research in dogs has been lacking - until now. A single dose helped dogs relax and their cortisol levels to drop.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- A recently published study suggests that CBD can significantly alleviate both car travel stress and “home alone” stress in canine companions
- The researchers showed that a single dose of 4 mg/kg CBD given 2 hours before the stress-inducing event reduced some indicators of acute canine stress, and is likely to improve canine emotional wellbeing
- Both acute and chronic stress can take a toll on your dog’s health; when stress is prolonged, it’s associated with shortened lifespan and increased susceptibility to infections
- Fortunately, there are many natural approaches to help mitigate both separation-related and car travel stress in canine family members

Many dogs find car rides stressful, and this is especially true for pups who often or always find themselves at the veterinarian’s office, the grooming shop, or a boarding facility at the end of the ride. While lots of dogs tolerate visits to these places well enough, most would really prefer to be somewhere else!

Another thing that causes anxiety in an ever-growing number of dogs is being left at **home alone**, including dogs who don’t enjoy car travel! This is perhaps especially true for pups who joined families during the pandemic and enjoyed all-day human companionship until recently.

Dogs’ Stress Levels Improved With a Single Dose of CBD

Cannabidiol (CBD) has been proven to alleviate stress and anxiety in humans, but to date there hasn’t been much research on its effect on stressed and anxious dogs. However, recently, scientists at Mars Petcare’s Waltham Petcare Science Institute published a study on the use of cannabidiol (CBD) supplements in dogs left alone or traveling by car.¹

Their goal was to learn more about the impact of each scenario on canine stress levels and determine whether a single dose of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)-free CBD distillate could have a positive influence. According to a Waltham Petcare Science Institute press release:

“The blinded, randomized, placebo-controlled study looked at how CBD impacted the experience of 20 dogs in two commonplace activities that were anticipated to cause stress — car journeys and being left alone.”

Researchers collected a range of physiological (e.g., blood levels of cortisol, ear temperature, heart rate) and behavioral measures (e.g., whining, trembling, panting) at different times during the study. There were significant changes in several stress-related measures, with the car journey eliciting a more pronounced stress response.

Dogs then received either a placebo or CBD capsule (~4mg/kg bodyweight) and, two hours after administration, were exposed to either the separation event or car travel.

Researchers found multiple measures of the dogs' stress improved following administration of CBD. Specifically, dogs treated with CBD were scored as significantly less "sad," had significantly lower cortisol levels, exhibited less whining and were in a more relaxed emotional state overall than dogs that received a placebo."²

The researchers concluded that:

"The results obtained from this study suggest that a period of separation and car travel are stressful events for dogs, with travel in a vehicle eliciting a more pronounced stress response.

Further, a single dose of 4 mg/kg CBD 2 h prior to exposure to these events attenuates some indicators of acute canine stress, which is likely to improve canine emotional wellbeing. Additional research is required to better understand the effect of CBD at other dosages, formulations, and whether cumulative administration improves efficacy."³

Health Risks of Stress in Dogs

Both acute and chronic forms of stress can take a toll on your dog's health. When the stress is prolonged, it's associated with shortened lifespan and can also increase your dog's susceptibility to infections. Wound healing is also slowed in response to stress, while stomach ulcers and inflammatory bowel disease may be exacerbated.⁴

Dogs living with the stress of fear and anxiety disorders may also have shortened lifespans, while stress from separation anxiety is linked to increased skin disorders.⁵ In fact, when Rodney Habib and I were working on our **dog cancer documentary**, almost every expert we interviewed brought up the role of stress in canine disease — a topic that's worthy of further study.

As in humans, however, it's likely that stress affects individual dogs differently, with some being more sensitive than others. Dogs with bold personalities, for instance, have been found to stave off diseases better than shy dogs, even when coping with a highly stressful environment like an animal shelter.⁶ You can also play a role in how well your dog responds to and copes with stress by offering tools to help with calming.

Stress Relief for Dogs

If your dog is stressed or anxious, daily rigorous exercise is critical. This is a free, highly effective, and significantly overlooked therapy every dog owner should be using to prevent and treat stress and anxiety. Dedicated playtime, daily mental stimulation (I like nose work the best), and focused affection may be the antidotes that will prove most beneficial for your canine family member.

If your dog responds well to pressure applied to her body, you can also try investing in a wrap like the Thundershirt or Ttouch, a massage technique that can help anxious pets. Sniffaris (allowing your dog to smell spots she finds on her walks to her heart's content) have also been associated with reduced stress hormones.

Calming music can also be soothing for some dogs, as can the simple act of leaving an article of clothing with your scent on it with your dog when you leave him home alone. During times of acute stress, homeopathic and TCM (traditional Chinese medicine) remedies, Rescue Remedy or other specific flower remedies may be helpful.

You can also diffuse lavender essential oil and consider having CBD or other herbal adaptogenic remedies on hand. The nice thing about natural stress support is that you can layer these treatments until there's a desired effect.

If the stress has become chronic or severe, applied zoopharmacognosy, which uses self-healing techniques offered through a trained professional, and consulting a **force free behaviorist** may offer your pet some relief and improve her long-term health in the process.

How to Help Your Dog Enjoy Car Rides

1. **Make car travel fun** — Some dogs seem to be hard-wired to love car rides. Others, not so much. If your dog has extreme anxiety about car travel, you may want to rethink a road trip, but there are ways to help her learn that a car ride is fun, starting with baby steps. For example, as a first step, put her in the car and stay in the driveway. Then, move up and down the driveway, or drive around the block.

From there, you can take brief trips to close locations your dog loves, such as a forest preserve, pet food store or grandma's house, to ease her into car travel. Be aware that, just like people, dogs may get motion sickness. Experiment with taking trips when your dog has an empty stomach vs. a few treats first. Some dogs do better when traveling on an empty stomach, while others do best with a small amount of food in their tummy.

2. **Put safety first** — You probably wouldn't even consider driving in your car without a seatbelt, and you shouldn't allow your dog to ride unrestrained either. When your car is in motion, I recommend most dogs stay in a crate that fits snugly, with enough room to be comfortable but not excess room (which poses a risk in an accident).

Depending on your dog's size and your vehicle, you can place the crate in the rear (such as in an SUV) or on the backseat. Look for crates and carriers that have strength-rated anchor straps or work in connection with your vehicle's existing LATCH connection systems (used for children's car seats) so the crate will be secure in the event of an accident.

Alternatively, you can use a safety harness to restrain your pet in the car, but be sure it has been crash-test certified for safety.

3. **Plan extra time for pit stops** — Travelling with a dog is not unlike travelling with a small child, in that you'll need to plan extra time for plenty of stops along the way. Your dog will need to stop to for a potty break and stretch his legs every few hours. Plan to have clean up supplies on hand, along with leash and harness, water bowl and fresh water to drink.

Be sure to plan for mealtimes — for your pet and you. Ideally, feed your dog in the morning before you leave and again at night once you've settled into your hotel. If you'll be stopping to eat along the way, plan to do so at a location where your pet can accompany you, as pets shouldn't be left unattended in cars.

4. **Pack for your pet** — When traveling with your pet, you'll need to bring all necessities, including items like poop bags and food bowls, but don't forget to also pack some of your dog's favorite toys, blankets and, depending on size, even his bed to remind him of home.

You should also make sure your dog is wearing a collar with a current ID tag at all times, and pack a pet first aid kit in the event of an emergency. A recent photo on your phone is also recommended, in the event you become separated.

5. **Expect the unexpected** — If you're expecting a road trip with your dog to be entirely free of hiccups, you may want to re-evaluate your expectations. Bringing your dog on vacation may provide you with wonderful new memories together and extra time to bond, provided your dog is truly up for the adventure.

However, it can also cause extra stress on both you and your pet, especially if things don't go exactly as planned. Be prepared to be flexible in your plans and keep your dog's best interest in mind, even if it means skipping an activity or two.

If he's generally nervous or fearful, he'll probably prefer to stay home, but even outgoing, confident dogs may have some anxiety when thrust into a new environment and routine. In this case, spraying your car or hotel room with Rescue Remedy or other anxiety-reducing flower essences may help take the edge off a potentially stressful situation.

Sources and References

[PetfoodIndustry.com February 22, 2023](#)

^{1,3} [Hunt, A.B.G. et al. Frontiers in Veterinary Science, 22 February 2023 Sec. Animal Behavior and Welfare Volume 10 - 2023](#)

² [PR Newswire News Release, Mars Petcare, February 22, 2023](#)

^{4,5} [Hekman, J.P. et al. Animals \(Basel\), 2014 Jun; 4\(2\): 331–347](#)

⁶ [Corsetti, S. et al. PLoS One, 2018 Mar 29;13\(3\):e0193794](#)
