

ORAH Info:

Reactive and Fearful Dogs

Getting from



to



Although we at ORAH try to make visits to the vet as fun as possible by offering lots of treats and encouragement, some dogs experience great anxiety when they come to see us. If your dog or puppy is one of the relaxed ones, you can work to keep them that way by bringing favorite foods or toys to your appointment. You can also stop in just for treats and petting, and even a quick step onto the scale to track weight. If your dog is one of the frightened or anxious ones, please know we aspire to be a fear-free practice, with the help of anti-anxiety medications and calming pheromones.

Trazadone, a human anti-anxiety medication, is our drug of choice. Much like in people, it has quite a dose range, and each dog is different. If we determine your dog might benefit from medication before an appointment, we will give you a prescription with the dose range on the bottle. For example, it might say "Give 1-4 tablets 2 hrs before appointment." Please take a week or so to figure out the best dose for your dog. When we use this drug for anxiety at home or on a walk, our goal is not sedation. But when we use it for vet visits, our goal IS sedation. Start at the low dose on the label at home. If sedation is not seen, increase the dose the next day and the next until you see drowsiness. The dose that causes drowsiness is the dose to use the day of your visit. Please know that if trazadone does not work for vet visits, we have other drug options.

In addition to appropriate drug therapy, we also recommend you bring home a spray bottle of Adaptil, the calming pheromone. Use the spray at home that morning before the car ride. You can remove your dog's collar, spray it, and replace it. You can also spray a towel and run it over your dog's coat. Spray the car as well before you get in. When coming to the clinic, the ideal approach is to bring two people to your appointment. Try to arrive at least 15 minutes early. Park away from the front door to avoid other dogs and the potential trigger of the clinic until we are ready for you. Have one person stay in the car with the dog while the other checks in. Our goal will be to use the room with the outside door, to allow your dog to skip the anxiety of the waiting room. The team will talk with you about what to expect, and the veterinarian and technician will get everything ready so your dog does not have to get nervous waiting.

Safety for everyone is important with a reactive, fearful dog. In the case of a dog whose response to fear might be to growl, lunge, or try to bite, using a muzzle is very helpful. We recommend you use a basket muzzle, such as a Baskerville. This type of muzzle is not confining; it allows your dog to pant and treats can be given through it. For a muzzle to be a helpful, positive tool in the clinic, you must practice with it at home. Allow your dog to get comfortable with the muzzle and show them they can eat treats (like chewy morsels or spray cheese) through the gaps. We also like calming caps by Gentle Leader or Premier, which can be found at pet stores. The muzzle and calming cap are often used together. In both cases, proper fit is very important. Please ask in advance if you need help finding these tools.

With the right preparation, your dog (and you) can be much less anxious about coming to the clinic. Good luck, and call us with any questions. We look forward to your dog's next visit!

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