

TIPS

for dealing with

CAR

SICKNESS

in

DOGS

by Janice Gunn



You have so many fun plans for your new puppy: play dates with friends' dogs, outings to the park or beach, and training classes. But... every time you put your puppy in the car he starts drooling and if you go more than a mile or two he vomits.

Chances are if this goes unchecked you won't want to take him out as often and when you do he may not get the greatest socialization experiences if he is still feeling nauseous from the car ride. He will also progress more slowly in his training classes.

Read on for tips on what causes car sickness and how you can minimize the effects.

What Causes Car Sickness In Puppies And Dogs?

Car sickness is typically caused by one of two things: A physical cause (most common in puppies) or a psychological one (more common in older dogs).

Physical Reason: For, puppies (and children) one of the most common causes of motion sickness is that the inner ear, which controls balance, is not yet fully developed. Most puppies who get car sick for this reason will gradually grow out of it typically by the end of the first year.

Older dogs can also suffer from inner ear infections or vestibular problems or be on medications that leave them prone to nausea when in a moving vehicle.

Psychological Reasons: Car sickness can also be an anxiety-based issue.

Car sickness caused by anxiety can actually develop from stress caused by the dog's original experiences with car sickness as a puppy. The dog has internalized those bad experiences and now that they are older they still feel anxious about the car even though they have outgrown the inner ear issue that was the problem in the first place.

Typical signs that your dog is feeling stressed in the car include:

- Whining
- Panting
- Diarrhea
- Yawning
- Drooling
- Lip licking
- Vomiting

Tips for Preventing Car Sickness

You can desensitize your dog to many of the signals and the traveling process itself to help them become comfortable with traveling in the car. Reducing anxiety and making the car a place the dog feels safe will have benefits even for dogs whose car sickness is inner ear related.

The Desensitization Process

The goal of this program is to lessen the dog's anxiety by creating a positive association with the car while it is not moving (at first) using food, treats and toys.

- It is safest that your dog travels in a crate that is tied down in your vehicle. Work to make your dog's crate a safe and relaxing environment by having him first spend time in the crate (in the house) and rewarding him with treats or toys for good behaviour. Gradually build up the time he can happily spend in the crate.
- Feed your dog his meal in the vehicle but don't go anywhere – do this a number of times. If your dog is hesitant to eat in the vehicle you can start by feeding him treats next to the vehicle and gradually building up to where he is inside.
- In the next steps you do not want to feed your dog prior to a ride. Actually, you don't want to feed your dog prior to any trips in the car. Wait at least 3-4 hours after his meal before he travels or wait until you arrive home to feed him
- With your dog in his crate in the vehicle, move the vehicle back and forth in the driveway and then let your dog out of the crate and car. Do this for a couple of days then gradually increase the distance and take a short drive down the street and come back home. Build distance and duration slowly.



Tips for Traveling with a Dog Prone to Motion Sickness

In a perfect world, you would be able to complete the desensitization program before going on a longer trip but... sometimes real life intrudes.

Things that help with the actual ride are:

- Don't feed your dog before going for at least 3-4 hours.
- Include a beloved toy or old t-shirt (that smells like home). We are trying to raise the dog's comfort level and make him feel safe.
- Keep the vehicle on the cool side (being overly warm can also cause nausea).
- Keep air circulating – keep the windows cracked at least a little to provide some air movement.
- Have your dog face forward in the vehicle.
- If possible, block your dog's view of the windows so he isn't watching the landscape roll past.



If you think your dog is getting ready to vomit (lots of drool or dry retching) try pulling over and taking him for a short walk.

And just in case:

Line your dog's crate with absorbent (disposable or washable) material. Some people use old towels or newsprint (newspaper ink can be toxic so we don't recommend actual newspaper).

Keep a roll of paper towels, a spray cleaner, and some medium-sized plastic bags in the car. If your dog does get sick then you can at least clean up and put all the used paper towels / absorbent material into a sealed plastic bag for easy disposal.

And remember your dog doesn't want to get sick – getting mad or raising your voice will just add to your dog's anxiety – it is important to keep everything calm.



Medications



While most dogs will outgrow car sickness by the time they are a year old some will struggle with it their entire lives. There are a variety of medications that your veterinarian can recommend.

Anti-nausea medications: For puppies and young dogs consider, over the counter options like Gravol or Dramamine (consult your veterinarian for the right dosage.) There also a number of new veterinary drugs that help with nausea that your veterinarian may recommend.

Anti-anxiety medications: As car sickness is often an anxiety-related problem your vet has an extensive selection of pharmaceutical options they can prescribe for your dog.

Herbal remedies: Some people have found success with Ginger, Valerian or Rescue Remedy but again please check with your vet before giving herbal remedies to your pet.

Janice Gunn is an internationally known dog trainer, top dog-sport competitor, and in-demand obedience seminar presenter.

She belongs to an elite group of trainers who have earned the very prestigious perfect score in competitive obedience. Janice has earned perfect scores at all levels of competition and with 9 different dogs!

Janice's training articles have been featured in DogSport and Front and Finish Magazines and is the author of several successful video training courses for obedience competitors.

