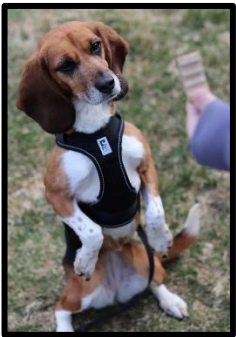


Behaviour Tips: *Teach your dog to “Go to the vet”!*

Your veterinary team wants to provide as **fear- and stress-free** of a visit as possible whenever you bring your dog to the vet. The staff will have a number of strategies to help keep your dog calm, relaxed, and comfortable while under their care, however there are plenty of things that you, as an owner, can do to further accustom – and even teach - your dog to go the vet!

The easiest thing you can do at home is to take petting your dog - something you already do every day - to the next level. The average dog is used to being pet on their head and back, but isn't used to having their ears, muzzle, paws, and other parts of their body touched or looked at. **These are important aspects of a regular veterinary physical exam, so it is essential that your dog becomes comfortable with this.** Dedicate some time each day to massage your dog's entire body, making sure to focus on the areas mentioned above. Turn this into an even more positive experience with the use of treats for a positive association with touch and handling (Right ear, *treat!* Left ear, *treat!*). However, be sure not to rush, or force your dog to stay if they pull away from you during their massage. The key is to go at your dog's pace. For example, start at your dog's shoulder and slowly work down the leg to the paw. If your dog pulls away closer to the paw, then back up a few steps and work on just massaging the leg for the next few days, and work closer to their paw over time.

One third of owners report that their dogs hate going to the vet. This ultimately impairs the vet care that their dog receives because an owner may be more hesitant to bring their dog based on their behavior. **“Happy visits”** are a great way to familiarize your dog with the veterinary hospital and show them the fun side of going, rather than the possibly scary. You simply schedule a time with your vet to stop by and have your dog get plenty of treats, praise, and pets from everyone there! This helps to ease both their anxiety, as well as yours, because your dog will look forward to the vet. Speaking of treats, everyone knows that **treats are always better when you're hungry!** If your dog is



particularly food motivated, perhaps feeding them only half of their breakfast would make the yummy treats they receive at the vet that much more of a reward. If your dog has any food allergies, please remember to tell your veterinarian about them at the start of the visit so that they can use the appropriate treats. It can also be helpful to save a high value treat, that your pet really loves, strictly for vet visits. They will then associate going to the vet with getting their favorite

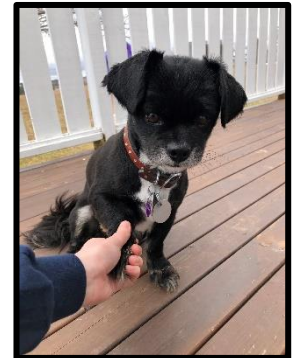
snack! Many dogs think being examined is great if the lickmat in front of them is covered in whipped cream cheese!

If your dog is especially anxious or fearful when going somewhere new or when traveling in the car, it might be worth talking to your veterinarian about anti-anxiety medications for them. If your dog gets car sick when traveling, you could also talk about anti-nausea medication to make the car ride less of a stressful event prior to going to the vet. **Your veterinarian will work with you to determine the best medication choice for your dog** based on their behavior history and the situations in

which you would need the medications. Fearful dogs may also benefit from a **Thundershirt**. Research has shown that these pressure wraps reduce heart rates and stress behaviours, such as yawning and tongue flicking, in anxious dogs.

It can also be extremely beneficial to prepare your pet for tasks they may have to do at the clinic. **The more your pet is willing to do on their own, the less manipulation will be required and the more in control they will feel.** Practice having

your dog step up onto objects that may resemble a scale for weighing the dog. Use a short cardboard box to start and cover it with a yoga or bath mat so they do not slip (choose blue or yellow – colours they can see). Teach your dog to sit on a yoga/bath mat upon request (“mat! *TREAT!*) so that the mat can go anywhere with you and is safe place for the dog.



Then teach your dog the requests sit, down, stand, paw, and side (for lying on the side) on and off the mat. Teaching these on the mat will prep your dog for a collaborative vet exam. Dogs can learn left and right and you can help them by pointing. Dogs who can sit up like the beagle pictured can allow a vet to exam their belly skin effortlessly. Even dogs without anxiety can become anxious when restrained, so if they can do all of this proficiently themselves, you will decrease the amount of manipulation necessary to perform various tasks. Dogs who can stand still or lie calmly with one leg out or forward just made drawing blood simple for the vet staff.

You can also **teach your dog to relax and be calm and to take a deep breath** (https://www.karenoverall.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Protocol-for-teaching-dogs-to-take-a-deep-breath_Overall.pdf; <https://www.karenoverall.com/protocol-for-relaxation-behavior-modification-tier-1/>). These techniques may help your dog practice remaining calm throughout various distractions and situations and can be used in clinical situations for exams, radiographs, listening to the heart and in many other situations.

Finally, if your dog is very worried even after all this, please talk to your veterinarian about medication to be given before, during and after the appointment. Medication can make all the difference and is now commonly used in this situation. No one should be scared to get care.

Although these tips are helpful, please discuss any behavioural/medical concerns with your local veterinarian. For all cases where you still have concerns, seek specialist services (www.dacvb.org). At AVC you can contact the AVC Behavioural Medicine Service (AVCBehaviouralMed@upei.ca).

Volk JO et al. Executive summary of the Bayer veterinary care usage study. J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2011 May 15;238(10):1275-82. doi: 10.2460/javma.238.10.1275. PMID: 21568772.

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Photos of Zumma and Maddie courtesy of Brittney Dow and Victoria Ashley.