

Stress and Anxiety in Dogs - Understanding the Signs and How Therapy Can Help

What Are Stress and Anxiety?

in dogs are emotional and physical responses to situations that make them feel uneasy, fearful, or overwhelmed. While some stress is normal, **chronic or unresolved stress** can affect a dog's **behaviour, mobility, and overall health**.

Dogs may experience stress for many reasons - changes in environment, pain, separation, or even subtle shifts in daily routine. Over time, this can lead to **muscle tension, poor posture, and reduced flexibility**, as well as emotional distress.

Common Causes of Stress and Anxiety

- Changes in home routine or environment
- Loud noises (fireworks, storms, traffic)
- Separation from owners or companions
- Pain, illness, or restricted mobility
- Visits to the vet or grooming appointments
- Past trauma or negative experiences
- Age-related cognitive decline
- Lack of exercise, stimulation, or rest

Each dog experiences stress differently - recognising the signs early helps prevent both emotional and physical complications.

Signs and Symptoms

- Restlessness, pacing, or panting
- Shaking, drooling, or excessive yawning
- Changes in appetite or sleep
- Avoidance or clingy behaviour
- Tension through the neck, shoulders, or back
- Licking, chewing, or scratching excessively
- Aggression or withdrawal
- Decreased mobility or reluctance to move

Physical signs like **tight muscles, uneven posture, or stiffness** can be overlooked but are key indicators of long-term stress.

How Therapy Helps

Osteopathy and massage therapy can provide powerful support for dogs experiencing stress and anxiety. These therapies promote **relaxation, body awareness, and comfort**, helping dogs both physically and emotionally.

Therapeutic Benefits:

- **Encourages relaxation:** Gentle touch activates the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting calmness.
- **Reduces muscle tension:** Eases tightness caused by stress-related bracing or poor posture.
- **Improves circulation and flexibility:** Supports better oxygen flow and movement.
- **Supports the nervous system:** Calms overstimulation and helps restore balance.
- **Releases endorphins:** Natural "feel-good" hormones that reduce anxiety and promote wellbeing.
- **Improves body-mind connection:** Helps dogs feel more grounded, confident, and secure.

Osteopathy and Massage can play a key role in a holistic approach to emotional and physical health.

Aftercare and Support

- Maintain a **consistent daily routine** to reduce uncertainty.
- Create a **safe, calm environment** with quiet spaces and familiar scents.
- Provide **gentle exercise and mental enrichment** suited to your dog's needs.
- Use **positive reinforcement** and avoid punishment-based training.
- Consider **music therapy, calming aids, or enrichment activities** as advised by your therapist or vet.
- Keep up **regular therapy sessions** to maintain relaxation and prevent tension build-up.
- Work alongside your **veterinarian or behaviourist** if anxiety is severe or persistent.

Therapy helps dogs with stress and anxiety by easing physical tension, promoting relaxation, and supporting emotional balance for a calmer, more comfortable life.