

Car Sickness in Dogs

My dog gets sick when we travel. What causes this?

Motion sickness in dogs is a common problem. Motion or car sickness is more common in younger dogs than in adults. The reason may be that the parts of the inner ear involved in balance are not fully developed. Puppies will often outgrow motion sickness by the time they are about 1 year old.

Many adult dogs become anxious or even nauseous during travel due to a lack of conditioning and the overwhelming, unusual stimuli associated with moving inside a vehicle. Dogs that travel only once or twice a year (typically when visiting the veterinarian) are not used to car rides and often associate the car ride with the stressful experience that follows. This association causes heightened anxiety and stress and may result in vomiting and diarrhea.

How can I tell if my dog is getting motion sickness?

Signs your dog may be experiencing motion sickness include:

- whining and pacing
- excessive drooling
- smacking or licking lips
- lethargy or inactivity
- vomiting
- defecation

How can I prevent motion sickness in my dog?

The best way to ease your dog's travel anxiety is by taking several short trips before embarking on a long haul. Start by simply placing your dog in your car, starting the motor, and sitting there without moving for a few minutes. The next day, repeat this process, but back out of your driveway and then return. Be sure to praise your dog and offer a food reward for good behavior. Next, try a trip around the block. Gradually work your way up to riding comfortably for 20 to 30 minutes.

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Conditioning your dog to ride comfortably in the car may require several days or even weeks. Be sure to gradually expose your nervous pet to increasingly challenging stimuli. You cannot force your dog to "get over" or "deal with" his anxiety.

Make sure you maintain a calm and cool attitude, and do not scold your dog if he begins to howl or whine. Continuing to expose your dog to a stressful situation will only cause them to further associate the car with displeasure and fear, and cause setbacks in your training.

Here are additional tips to make your dog's travel more enjoyable and reduce motion sickness:

- If it is not too stressful, **withhold food for up to 8 hours before travel.** An empty stomach will help reduce nausea and the need for frequent potty breaks that are often unwelcome, especially during long car rides or airplane or train travel.
- **Provide access to fresh water whenever possible.** Water bottles that hang on the carrier's door are a good option for many pets.
- **Use a carrier or dog safety harness.** Anxious dogs can both hurt themselves and cause accidents. Many dogs view a carrier as a "safe place". Getting your dog used to the carrier or harness before getting into the car is recommended.
- **Keep the car cool and quiet.** Play soft classical music and keep the temperature cool.
- **Include the smell of home.** Add a t-shirt or blanket with your scent to your dog's carrier
- **Offer special trip toys.** Giving your dog new toys that he only gets to play with when he travels can help him associate travel with fun.

If your dog seems to need a little more help to stay calm during travel, talk to your veterinarian about using one of the following remedies:

- **Non-prescription medication:** Calming medications such as those containing casein protein derivative (Zylkene®) or L-Theanine (Anxitaine® or Solliquin®) can help. Natural remedies, including Bach® flower (Rescue Remedy®), kava, valerian, passionflower, ginger, and skullcap can also be helpful. It is important to consult your veterinarian before starting any medications or supplements, even non-prescription.
- **Dogs- Anti-nausea medication:** Maropitant (Cerenia®, a veterinary-specific prescription medication), dimenhydrinate (Dramamine®), and meclizine (Antivert® and Bonine®) can prevent vomiting in a stressed pet. A single dose of Cerenia® lasts 24 hours. Note that these drugs only help with motion sickness, not anxiety. Ask your veterinarian if these medications are appropriate for your dog and to obtain the correct dosages and frequency to administer.

*Dosing guidelines for (the human medications) Dramamine/Bonine/Antivert(give 1 hour prior to travel)

Dramamine for Kids = 12.5 mg per tablet.

- Dogs 5-15 pounds - 1 tablet every 8 to 12 hours as needed

Dramamine = 25 mg per tablet

- Dogs 15-30 lbs - 1 tablet every 8 to 12 hours as needed
- Dogs 30-50 lbs - 2 tablets every 8 to 12 hours as needed
- Dogs 50-75 lbs - 3 tablets every 8 to 12 hours as needed
- Dogs 75-100 lbs - 4 tablets every 8 to 12 hours as needed

Bonine / Antivert = 25 mg per tablet

Dogs 0 - 50 lbs - 1 tablet once a day

- Dogs >50 lbs - 2 tablets once a day