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“**Separation anxiety can not only lead to distress in dogs but can leave pet owners dealing with the aftermath of destructive behaviors.**”

If you think your dog is suffering from separation anxiety, visit [Reconcile.com](https://www.Reconcile.com) to learn more and take the assessment quiz or schedule an appointment with your veterinarian.

A Case Study for Pet Owners on Canine Separation Anxiety: Puddin’s Tale

Canine anxiety is a common problem in many households. In fact, 1 survey found that as many as 17% of dogs fit the criteria for separation anxiety alone,¹ which describes certain negative behaviors dogs exhibit when temporarily left alone (eg, when a caretaker leaves the home).

Like many behavior conditions in pets, separation anxiety can not only lead to distress in dogs but can leave pet owners dealing with the aftermath of destructive behaviors, and sadly, unresolved behavioral problems are common reasons for relinquishment to animal shelters.²

Although separation anxiety can be taxing, there are many tools available. The following case is presented by board-certified veterinary behaviorist, Dr. Julia Albright, and shows how a comprehensive approach can result in treatment success as well as how your pet’s medications should be handled and their behavior monitored closely for any changes.

Puddin’s Case

Puddin’, a 2-year-old Havanese, was presented with signs of separation anxiety. The family did not feel they could leave Puddin’ alone due to her level of distress and had been arranging their schedules so someone could always be home with her. If no one could be home with Puddin’, alternative solutions included a dog play facility, sitters, or accompanying family members on outings, but this created an emotional and financial strain on the family.

The Diagnosis

After assessing Puddin’s health and observing her on webcams for other behavioral issues (eg, urinating inside the home, reaction to external noises), Puddin’ was officially diagnosed with separation anxiety, and a treatment plan that included many layers to improve her panic and distress immediately and in the long-term was developed.

The Treatment

The basic steps for treating separation anxiety include addressing the pet’s overall health and

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This case study was provided with permission by boarded veterinary behaviorist Dr. Julia Albright, an associate professor at University of Tennessee. You can read more about Dr. Albright and her work at vetmed.tennessee.edu/vmc/SmallAnimalHospital/AnimalBehavior

IMPORTANT SAFETY

INFORMATION: The most common adverse events reported in decreasing order of reported frequency are: decreased appetite, depression/lethargy, shaking/shivering/tremor, vomiting, restlessness and anxiety, seizures, aggression, diarrhea, mydriasis, vocalization, weight loss, panting, confusion, incoordination, and hypersalivation. Reconcile chewable tablets are contraindicated for dogs with a history of seizures or when used with MAOIs. For product label, including complete safety information, see package insert.

The conclusion in this case study is for educational purposes only to ensure that changes related to drug brands or dosage amounts should be evaluated under the care of a veterinarian.

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mental enrichment, behavior modification to change the emotional and behavioral response to being left alone, and addressing the neurochemicals creating the fear and panic.

After creating a treatment plan that included enrichment, exercise, and behavior modification, Puddin' began Reconcile® (fluoxetine hydrochloride), an FDA-approved flavored, chewable medication for the treatment of separation anxiety in dogs in conjunction with behavioral modification training. Many dogs see benefit within 1 to 2 weeks of starting treatment with Reconcile, but the full effects may not be seen for up to 8 weeks; thus, the family was encouraged to continue to avoid separation during that time. Like many dogs with separation anxiety, continuing to leave Puddin' alone did not help alleviate the problem; Puddin' is a good example of sensitization, or worsening of the problem when the dog is exposed to their fears at high levels (in this case, separation from people).

In a follow-up conversation 2 weeks after beginning Reconcile, Puddin' was tolerating the medication well, and during brief training sessions, she would remain calm on a dog bed while a family member opened the exit door. Progress continued in a slow but steady manner over the next few weeks. Approximately 6 to 12 months after the initial consult, Puddin' was observed to be calm and resting for up to 6 hours alone in the home, at which point she was still being administered Reconcile daily and her behavior was very stable.

A Setback

Approximately 14 months after starting Reconcile, Puddin' was switched abruptly from Reconcile to another medication by another veterinarian as a perceived convenience and cost-saving measure for the family.* Puddin's family contacted the clinic after the reemergence of signs of separation anxiety with no other perceived changes in the household.

The Recommendation

Questioning Puddin's owner revealed the correlation between the medication switch and worsening of separation issues. Puddin' was placed back on Reconcile and the separation plan restarted. Although it took more than a month, Puddin' was able to be left alone for >6 hours again; ≈2 years later, Puddin' was able to be successfully weaned off all medications.

Conclusion

Anxiety problems in dogs can feel daunting, but just as other clinical diseases can be treated, so too can separation anxiety. With the right approach and some help from the veterinary team, separation anxiety can be conquered and both pet and pet owner can achieve an improved quality of life.

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*No head-to-head studies were conducted between products. Recommendations are based solely on the treating veterinarian's observation and experience.