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Dog anxiety is real. These products can help calm your anxious pet

BY [JESS JOHO](#) MAY 03, 2021

Dogs can be one of the best natural remedies for anxiety in humans. But experienced pup parents know that anxiety can also be just as big of a problem for our four-legged friends, too.

Lots of products — from supplements to calming beds — sell themselves on helping to manage dog anxiety. But there's also a lot of misinformation and pseudo-science being sold, which is why we asked three veterinary and dog behavioral experts for their advice on which aids and products might actually help tackle the beast of anxiety.

Is anxiety common for dogs?

"Anxiety is common, and often dogs with it exhibit a wide range of symptoms and severity," said [Dr. Travis Arndt](#), medical director at the [Animal Medical Center of Mid-America](#) in Missouri. The current moment is a particularly hairy time for anxious pups, too, as the pandemic's disruptions to our schedules and lifestyles (including our pets') now once again threatens to drastically change. "Dogs, being creatures of habit, don't usually like changes to their routines."

According to Dr. Jennifer Frione, a veterinarian who owns the [Lakeside Animal Hospital](#) in Florida, "Our pets have been affected by the COVID-19 crisis just like we have. While we are finding ways to cope with the pandemic stress, pets have anxiety, too. Now that the vaccine is widely available and people and places are going back to normal, prepare for your pet to experience separation anxiety as you return to work or other activities."

But the pervasiveness of dog anxiety goes far beyond current circumstances.

"There can be a genetic predisposition or anxiety can be caused by either or both mental or physical trauma," said Dr. Wailani Sung, the director of behavior and welfare programs at the [San Francisco SPCA](#), an independent nonprofit animal welfare organization and hospital not

associated with ASPCA. "Anxiety is the worry that something scary or bad may occur – most likely due to a previous negative experience or fear of the unknown."

What are signs a pet might be facing anxiety?

There are a host of [different types of anxiety](#). But our veterinary experts said some of the most common symptoms can include:

- Incessant pacing
- Panting
- Upset stomach or more frequent accidents
- Destroying things around the house (like scratching doors and windows, chewing items or even through doors)
- Not eating or accepting treats
- Excessive whining or barking
- Chewing and licking a hot spot constantly and possibly causing bleeding
- Shaking
- Excessive salivation
- Hiding under the furniture
- Escape attempts like jumping out of the window
- Fear-based aggression toward other dogs and people

While some products can help manage a dog's anxiety, none are ever a replacement for the more long-term, fundamental practices like behavioral modification training and lifestyle management, Dr. Sung said. The most important fixes for dog anxiety include: lots of socialization and early (positive) exposure to common triggers at 3-12 weeks of age, daily exercise, play and entertainment, good diet, and consistent routines. In some severe cases, [prescribed pharmaceutical medications](#) may be necessary.

"As with any medical or behavior problem facing our pets, early recognition and intervention are key to successfully managing the issue. Promote calm in your dog's daily life using professional guidance from your veterinarian and behaviorist to provide behavioral modification, and to select the combination of medication and behavioral support products appropriate for your dog," said Dr. Arndt.

While treatments vary greatly depending on the type of anxiety and triggers, Dr. Sung said one widely applicable behavioral training method for anxiety is, "redirecting the dog whenever he starts to look anxious." To do that, you must first train a foundation of commands that shifts their attention away from the trigger, like: sit, look, touch, find it, go to mat, leave it, turn around, etc. "They can be redirected to fun activities, such as playing fetch or tug of war. Dogs with noise sensitivities should be provided with a safe space to retreat to."

Behavioral training strategies like this one have been tried and tested through decades of research and practice. But the same can't be said for many anxiety products. While the ones listed below have other benefits like being easier and more accessible than one-on-one dog training lessons, there's often not a lot of scientific data or study to prove their efficacy — so approach many with a grain of salt.

"While these products are widely available, there is not always the level of guidance provided to owners. When people have little guidance from veterinary or behavioral professionals, often they select products based on price or testimony of friends, family, or sales associates. Lastly, if used incorrectly these products and supplements delay pet owners from seeking the professional help their dog needs and risks the anxiety worsening," said Dr. Arndt.

Dr. Sung also advised staying away from new and trendy anxiety reducers with not only no scientific testing but potentially negative impacts, too, like CBD and certain essential oils.

"We don't know what the appropriate doses are to reduce anxiety. We don't know how CBD can potentially interact with other medications and how it is metabolized. Many products tested do not contain the stated amount of CBD or can be cross-contaminated with THC," she warned.

Ultimately, Dr. Frione said that "Canine anxiety unfortunately does not have one easy fix. It is complex and takes time, patience, and consistency to help your fur-baby overcome it."

Also, the products spotlighted below include only what we were able to get samples of and review for ourselves by testing it on the author's extremely anxiety-prone rescue pit bull. Any other products referenced and linked are still expert-recommended, but not personally tested.

So what's a pet parent to do? We tried some of the most-recommended dog anxiety products to see if they really worked.



Purina Pro Plan Veterinary Supplements Calming Care

While other products on this list will be more beneficial for dogs with specific types of anxiety and phobias, behavioral supplements are best for generalized anxiety, according to Dr. Sung.

As with most behavioral supplements, it can take up to six weeks for Purina's powder mix to take effect. While I didn't notice any drastic changes in the couple weeks I had to test it, though, I do trust the scientific evidence backing it more than other, more fast-acting anxiety remedies.

"Just like us, pets can benefit from high-quality supplements added to their diet at any stage of life," said Dr. Frione. "L-theanine and L-tryptophan are both amino acids that help reduce the stress response and promote relaxation." But "not all supplements are made alike, so some are of better quality than others."

According to Dr. Sung, some — like [Purina](#), [Vetoquinol Zylkene](#), [Solliquin](#), and [Anxitane](#) — have all been studied to find evidence of reductions in anxiety.

"A good supplement contains the natural product which will act at a receptor site inside the body in the most purified form with little added extraneous ingredients," said Dr. Arndt. "Each product has a unique action, but they are similar in that the natural chemical contained in the product binds to an emotional chemical receptor in the body, producing feelings of calm and pleasure." But some popular and highly rated supplements can fail to contain high enough doses to be effective, Dr. Sung said, like PremiumCare's Hemp Dog Treats, Maxxipaws' Natural Non-Drowsy Calming Aid, and Rescue Remedy's Natural Pet Stress Relief. While she has no personal experience with them, Dr. Sung saw more potential in treat supplements like [Vet's Best Comfort Calm Soft Chews](#) and [Zesty Paws Advanced Calming Bites](#), while Dr. Arndt would prefer [VetriScience's Composure Treats](#).

Aside from picking the most scientifically backed supplements, Dr. Fione said it's always important to consult with your vet first too.

"Your pet's lifestyle, age, weight, and any illnesses or diseases are important considerations when adding a supplement. Your veterinarian will help guide you to the best supplements specifically for your pet's needs." Also, it's useful to, "pick a way to administer it that best fits you and your pet's lifestyle. If it is easier to give your pet a treat every morning, then find a supplement in the form of a treat. If your pet does not like treats, then maybe a powder or liquid form is best."

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ThunderShirt Dog Anxiety Jacket



It could either have zero effect (other than, as with my pup, making your dog look cute) or it could make a world of difference — particularly for anxiety caused by specific triggers like fireworks and thunderstorms.

One of the go-to recommendations for affordable and holistic anxiety aids, the ThunderShirt is infamously a hit or miss. It could either have zero effect (other than, as with my pup, making your dog look cute) or it could make a world of difference — particularly for anxiety caused by specific triggers like fireworks and thunderstorms.

But it's impossible to know which response your dog will have until you try it.

"It's based on the theory that pressure on certain areas of the body can reduce anxiety," Dr. Sung explained. Though, while "one study [on Thundershirts] showed a reduction in heart rate, it showed no other decrease in anxious behaviors." Despite this, Sung does recommend at least trying Thundershirts since "it is inexpensive and either works or not. No side effects."

Dr. Arndt is a huge champion of them, too, and believes they can be even more effective when combined with "canine appeasing pheromones" like [Adaptil that you can spray on it](#).

"The simplest theory is that the Thundershirt stimulates nerves and gives a reassurance that someone or something comforting is close by. This has been widely researched and verified across multiple species. The recent rise in the use of weighted blankets in people is for similar reasons," he said.

While we were unfortunately unable to get samples of the spray or other pheromone-based therapies to test ourselves, Dr. Arndt confirmed my suspicions that it could possibly be a great aid for my [dog's leash anxiety and reactivity](#).

"I like Thundershirts because they can be removed and worn by pets when they have situational anxiety, like during thunderstorms or veterinary visits, and they can be left on all day long if needed. Also, because Adaptil can be sprayed on the Thundershirt, the dog can benefit from two therapies together, each stimulating different areas in the brain. This often provides great results."



DogTV

The desensitizing sounds really did seem to help even my six-year-old ball of anxiety become less reactive to sounds like knocking and city bustle.

Leaving the TV on is a method many pup parents already use. But DogTV raises the bar with programming that Dr. Sung described as being "designed to appeal to the dog's senses," by "playings sounds in frequencies that dogs can hear and in colors that dogs can see."

Dr. Frione agreed, saying that "I always recommend soothing dog separation anxiety by turning the TV or radio on before leaving the house, so a special show or podcast for dogs is even better."

DogTV does have [some solid science](#) behind it in theory — though it's unclear whether the

actual product has been studied as effective for anxiety relief. Anecdotally, though, I was pretty amazed by how much it helped not only relax my dog during the usual ordeal of me leaving the house, but also kept my kitten entertained.

Human TV can be a bit stressful for pups due to all the potentially overstimulating noises and colorizations intended to grab your attention. DogTV's channel instead features stuff like potentially triggering noises (for desensitization), stimulating visual objects, and soothing canine-specific frequencies.

It recommends you watch alongside your fur child the first few times, and let me tell you, some of it is nightmarish from the human perspective. One segment displayed a blue circle bobbing around randomly to the tune of haunting-sounding electronic music over an anxiety-inducing thumping heartbeat. I couldn't imagine how it'd relax any creature. But then I remembered that dogs actually listen to their human's heartbeat, so actually, it would make sense as a comforting sound to hear when you're not around.

Like most anxiety aids, DogTV warns that it can take weeks for the benefits to become evident, and does offer a month-long free trial. Undoubtedly, it'll be more effective on some dogs than others, with the visual stimulations probably most enticing to hyperactive breeds that crave mental stimulation (like poodles, for example). But also, your dog doesn't actually need to watch it in the same way you'd watch TV for it to have an effect.

Aside from the 24-hour live channel, there are pre-recorded playlists for specific things like relaxation. There's even some interesting programming for humans on dog training and psychology, making DogTV a particularly great option for new pup parents. The desensitizing sounds really did seem to help even my six-year-old ball of anxiety become less reactive to sounds like knocking and city bustle.

Usually, leaving the house for any amount of time is a guilt trip for the ages, my pittie gazing at me with that look of betrayal on his big, saucer-like seal pup eyes. With DogTV playing, though, he didn't even notice when I quietly slipped out the door and, upon my return, seemed surprised to realize I'd even been gone for an hour.

You can access DogTV on iOS, Android, Roku, Fire TV, Apple TV, Android TV, Tizen TV, Samsung Smart TV, and Universal Windows Platform (including Xbox).



Hyper Pet Licking Mat for Cats & Dogs

To my surprise, after some initial trepidation, his love for peanut butter did overtake his suspicion.

Now, this might look like just some weird silicone food dish. But there's a good amount of sound science and convincing [anecdotal testimonials from the Strategist](#) on why this licking mat with grooves can have a calming effect around triggers (or whenever you need guaranteed peace and quiet).

"It is providing your pet with something to do," said Dr. Sung. In line with the attention redirecting strategies of behavioral training methods for anxiety management, the idea is that it diverts your dog's focus away from the anxiety-inducing trigger toward something delicious instead. In addition, licking is something dogs already do to manage their anxiety, so encouraging that could help. "If your dog's level of anxiety is low to moderate, you may be able to prevent his anxiety from escalating by redirecting him to lick his favorite treat from the mat. It

can be used to help form positive associations with his triggers."

My dog is one of those shelter pups who experienced some unknowable horrors that led to weirdly specific and unexplainable triggers. He is terrified of computer cables and wires, for example, as well as puzzle toys — which once left him shaking in fear. So I wasn't entirely convinced this would work, since it's basically using the same logic of a puzzle toy.

To my surprise, after some initial trepidation, his love for peanut butter did overtake his suspicion. But I did find that it was a bit unpractical to have this loaded up and ready to go for whenever something triggering like watching the mailman do his job from the living room window.

Additionally, Dr. Sung warned that, "If the level of anxiety is high, the dog may not be interested in working for treats."

That's certainly been true in the past for mine, who completely shuts down in situations of extreme anxiety to the point where he's physically incapable of ingesting even his favorite treats. I'd also caution against this method for dogs who are overweight, since creating a dependency on more caloric intake to solve anxiety can lead to a host of other health problems.



Spotify's My Dog's Favorite Podcast

I can't say it made him stop barking or guarding altogether. But for a free service, it was effective enough to recommend.

Hearing is one of your dog's most important senses, so soothing through sonic aids comes with scientific backing. Classical music has been found to have [calming effects on dogs](#), while another study found [audiobooks to be even more helpful](#) to shelter dogs (who are coping with an environment rife with anxiety and stress).

That's why there's reason to believe Spotify Studio's claims about their new [podcast playlist for dogs](#) while you away, with the intention of being "a beautiful audio experience designed to calm and reassure your dog, with specially commissioned music and soothing voices," that are meant to be the "ultimate canine companion for any hound left home alone." With praise-oriented stories read by actors Ralph Ineson and Jessica Raine, they read like daily affirmation but specifically for your good boy or girl.

Since recently moving, my pup has become obsessive about guarding us through vigilant patrol of the window overlooking the street. From squirrels to people to other dogs, there is always something new to bark at and drive me up a wall. But the minute I put on Raine's dulcet tones, his posture grew less stiff until he dozed off into a nap, as she told him all the things I usually tell him — like how thankful she was for him looking out for us, but that we were safe, and he could relax.

I can't say it made him stop barking or guarding altogether. But for a free service, it was effective enough to recommend.

Spotify also lets you create music playlists specifically tailored to your pet (whether a dog, cat, iguana, hamster, or bird) [here](#). Notably, though, it's just regular music (not even specifically classical), so I'm not convinced it helps with anything specific to dogs or anxiety.

Best Friends by Sheri Calming Donut Dog Bed



I bought it for my dedicated donut sleeper, and only regret not trusting my gut and going with the smaller size, since a contained and secure space is the whole point.

I don't know about yours, but beds are basically my dog's sacred spaces. We keep one in every room of the house, knowing he'll want to curl up into a little ball and keep close by while I go about my business.

According to the vet and behavioral experts in [this PetMD article](#), dogs that prefer the curled-up donut sleeping position are believed to both be regulating body temperature and protecting themselves from vulnerability. It's a favorite for shelter dogs like mine. That's why a super comfy donut bed could do wonders to ensuring your scared-y pup feels as warm, cozy, and protected as possible.

"If the dog has associated the bed with positive feelings, such as being comfortable, warm and safe, then there is a potential the bed could help decrease anxiety," said Dr. Sung.

While Best Friends by Sheri's classic luxury shag bed hasn't specifically been researched for effectiveness, it's a popular favorite in the category. I bought it for my dedicated donut sleeper, and only regret not trusting my gut and going with the smaller size, since a contained and secure space is the whole point. But there's also plenty of more affordable options you can try too.



Snuggle Puppy

While it probably won't do much to help an adult dog, this adorable little imitator will probably be a godsend to pup parents dealing with separation anxiety.

OK so my little gremlin couldn't see this cute little anxiety toy as anything but the next destruction target. But notably, after I put the provided warming pack and little heartbeat device inside it, he suddenly became much more hesitant to tear into it (which is a first).

Snuggle Puppy is intended to help new puppies through one of the toughest parts of their young lives: transitioning into sleeping alone without the safety of their mother and siblings' puppy pile.

"Puppies and babies are soothed by the presence of a mother's beating heart," explained Dr. Sung.

While it probably won't do much to help an adult dog, this adorable little imitator will probably be a godsend to pup parents dealing with separation anxiety from little ones dealing with the stress of leaving the nest.