



# Stress in our Dogs: Common Triggers & Signs

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It can be hard to believe that our pampered pooches may be stressed. After all, they don't have 40-hour-plus work weeks, project deadlines, commutes in heavy traffic, teenagers, mortgage payments or credit card bills! However, although their stressors aren't necessarily the same as ours, research has established that dogs can and often do experience stress, and that stress may compromise their overall health and welfare.<sup>1,2</sup> For example, research has now elucidated details of the brain-gut connection: the release of norepinephrine (the "fight or flight" hormone) affects gastrointestinal physiology resulting in detrimental changes in gut bacteria, motility, pain sensitivity and other parameters.<sup>3</sup> This digestive upset often presents as diarrhoea in our patients, creating yet another stressful experience for the dog and the owner: house-soiling! Some dogs may experience short-lived or acute stressors but other dogs may live with chronic stress. An enhanced awareness and understanding of stress triggers, stress-related behaviours, and physiological stress consequences can help us identify and reduce canine stress and its negative health consequences.



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## 10 COMMON STRESS TRIGGERS FOR DOGS<sup>4</sup>:

1. Novelty — exposure to new items, new people, new animals, etc.
2. Loud noises — fireworks, thunderstorms, etc.
3. Changes in housing — moving to a new home, boarding, etc.
4. Changes in household members — new baby, new pet, loss of pet or human, houseguests, etc.
5. Changes in household routine — new job schedule, kids returning to school, holidays, etc.
6. Punitive training methods — shock collars, yelling, hitting, etc.
7. Invasion of personal space — disruption when resting, hugging, kissing, forcibly restraining, etc.
8. Lack of outlets for normal breed behaviours — herding, running, retrieving, etc.
9. Separation from human family members — separation anxiety, etc.
10. Poor (strained) relationships with other household members (pets or humans).

## TOP 10 SIGNS OF STRESS IN DOGS<sup>4</sup>:

While there are individual variations in the expression of stress and there can be other causes for these behavioral signs, below are the Top 10 Signs of Stress in Dogs:

1. Nose/lip licking
2. Yawning
3. Panting
4. Reduced or absent appetite
5. Diarrhoea
6. Tail lowered or tucked
7. Ears pulled or pinned back
8. Cowering/crouched body posture and/or hiding
9. Trembling/shaking
10. Increased vocalisations — whining, howling, barking

If a dog exhibits these signs of stress, try to identify and remove or reduce the stress triggers.

Additionally, for dogs under 14kg with stress-related GI upset, recommend Hill's™ Prescription Diet™ i/d™ Stress. i/d™ Stress is a highly digestible clinical nutrition formulated with milk protein hydrolysate, prebiotic fibre, and ginger to help alleviate stress-related digestive upset. For optimal results, feed well in advance of the stressful trigger. This food is formulated for maintenance in adult dogs and is therefore suitable for long-term use for those dogs that may experience chronic stress.

<sup>1</sup>Bamberger M, Houpt KA. Signalment factors, comorbidity, and trends in behavior diagnoses in dogs: 1,644 cases (1991-2001). *J Am Vet Med Assoc.* 2006;229(10):1591-1601.

<sup>2</sup>Dreschel, NA. The effects of fear and anxiety on health and lifespan in pet dogs. *Applied Animal Behavior Science.* 2010;125:157-162.

<sup>3</sup>Konturek PC, Brzozowski T, and Konturek SJ. Stress and the gut: pathophysiology, clinical consequences, diagnostic approach and treatment options. *J Physiology and Pharmacology.* 2011;62(6):591-599.

<sup>4</sup>Notari L. Stress in veterinary behavioural medicine. In Horwitz DF and Mills DS, editors. *BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural Medicine.* Gloucester, England: BSAVA, 2009:136-145.

