

Windmill Vets - Pet Advice Notes

Travel Sickness in Pets

For many cats and dogs a car journey is part of their lives at some stage. This may involve a trip to the park, a day out, a holiday or visit to the vet or boarding kennels. Many dogs are happy to travel in cars whilst others exhibit anxiety and nausea. Generally cats do not enjoy travelling and many resent the confinement to a basket. Not all pets that suffer from car sickness are anxious and puppies tend to suffer with car sickness more than adult dogs which suggests that a number of them “grow out of” motion sickness.

Dogs should be accustomed to being in the stationary car, ensuring they are comfortable and have somewhere to sleep. The next step is undertaking very short journeys and associating them with a positive experience at the end, such as a walk. Consider having someone other than the driver in the car to help reassure or distract the dog. Gradually build up the length of journeys and when travelling, try to select a route that involves straight roads more than windy lanes.

Cats can similarly be accustomed to spending time in the car with the engine off for short periods initially, before gradually increasing the length of journey. The use of feline facial pheromone extracts sprayed in the cat carrier a short time prior to a journey can be helpful.

Limit food and water intake just prior to travelling and allow your pet to toilet before the journey, drive gently and keep sound to a comfortable level. Whilst limiting food may not prevent motion sickness, there should be less dramatic effects. Opening the window to provide fresh air can be beneficial and some animals are less likely to experience motion sickness if they can see out of a window. For longer trips, stop every two hours to allow your dog to exercise and evacuate whilst providing access to a small quantity of water during these rest periods.

Motion sickness can be treated with a variety of oral medications but they need to be given 1-2 hours before the journey commences. Various anti-nausea medications are available from your vet although the options for cats are much more limited than for dogs. Skullcap and valerian tablets are licensed for use in both cats and dogs and indicated for prevention of anxiety and travel sickness. Some human antihistamine products can be used at an appropriate dose in dogs although they can cause drowsiness and none are licensed products.