

Does Your Dog Have Vet Phobia?

What to do when your dog fears the vet office.

Jon Geller, DVM

Q. We have a 5-year-old Boston Terrier named Sam. He is a well-behaved, sweet and obedient dog. Three years ago he was diagnosed with double hip dysplasia and knee arthritis. Surgery fixed Sam, thank goodness. However, after the surgery, Sam's visits to the vet have become a challenge. He is aggressive and lunges to bite everyone, including me. I have tranquilized him and also put a muzzle on him, then wrapped him in a throw, just to have better control. I'm afraid our vet is going to refuse service. I can't believe this is the same dog, because once we leave the office, he becomes the nicest dog on the planet, again. Help!

A. Some dogs develop severe anxiety about going to a veterinary hospital. It does not mean they were tortured or abused, only that they had a fearful experience that is locked in their memory. You might equate it with some folks' feelings about going to the dentist.

Regardless of the triggering event, at this point I would avoid taking your dog to the vet unless there is an emergency or Sam is obviously sick. In the meantime, find a gentle housecall veterinarian in your area who can stop by and help Sam out with routine, preventive care.

The first visit should be a friendly consultation where the veterinarian gets to know Sam, and allows Sam to become comfortable with him or her. Ask the veterinarian to hold off on even minor procedures, such as vaccinations, or anything more than a brief exam.

Your regular veterinarian may be able to refer you to someone who can offer a housecall or should be willing to forward Sam's records to anyone you choose. Your vet may be somewhat relieved with the change an anxious, aggressive dog gets everyone's blood pressure up.

Best,
Jon Geller, DVM

- Get More Advice From Dr. Geller -