

De-Stress Your Traveling Dog Holistically

All-natural remedies to calm your dog while on the road.

Lisa Hanks

To accustom your dog to travel and its crate, start gradually and keep the session positive. Make the crate attractive by adding your dog's favorite blanket and toy. Toss a treat into the crate, encouraging your dog to retrieve it. Do this a few times a day. When the dog seems comfortable going into the crate, feed it its meals in the crate with the door left open. Once the dog is accustomed to this, close the door while it is eating for brief periods. Gradually extend the time you leave the dog in the crate with the door closed. Repeat this process until the dog is comfortable being in the crate for a few hours.

Months before your trip is scheduled, accustom your dog to car travel. Lure it into the car with a treat and praise it highly for entering. (Leave the door open.) Do this daily for about a week, then put the dog into its crate or seat belt harness for short periods. Next, take short car trips that end with an enjoyable event, such as a romp in the park or a hike in the woods. Slowly extend the length of the trips, until the dog is comfortable spending several hours traveling with you.

How well trained and socialized is your dog?

Is it used to strangers and new situations? Did you take it to puppy kindergarten and obedience classes? If your dog does not respond readily to the basic commands — Sit, Stay and Come — you may need professional help resocializing it. Dogs that enjoy new faces and places are less likely to be stressed and more likely to be happy travelers. Ask your veterinarian and friends for referrals to a dog trainer.

How well do you travel?

Are you tense and edgy when driving? Do you yell at other drivers and shake your fist at delays? You may be unknowingly transferring your stress to your dog.

Clothier counseled one tense owner, whose dog traveled hunched fearfully, to relax and sing as she drove. "To my delight, she wrote me immediately, noting that as she began to pay attention to her own attitudes while driving, she discovered that indeed she was holding her breath, clenching the wheel and sitting rigidly," she said.

"She relaxed her hands, focused on her breathing, sat back more comfortably and began to sing whatever songs popped into her head. To her amazement, her dog first watched her with a raised eyebrow, then visibly relaxed, curled up on the seat next to her and slept peacefully all the way home.