

De-Stress Your Traveling Dog Holistically

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

Lisa Hanks

Does your dog turn into a whimpering pile of mush whenever you try to take it for a drive? Traveling is daunting when your best friend throws up on the upholstery, then attaches itself to your brake foot. If you approach the problem holistically, however, travel for the two of you can be downright fun. Ask yourself these questions:

Is your dog healthy? Be sure it has no illnesses affecting its ability to travel. Stress, fearfulness, anxiety and disorientation can be caused or aggravated by a number of health problems, including chemical or hormonal imbalances and food allergies. "Biochemical imbalances, hypothyroidism, etc., can all impact negatively on the animal's ability to cope with stress," said Suzanne Clothier, a holistic trainer in St. Johnsville, N.Y. "Such problems should be addressed and corrected."

Why is your dog becoming carsick? If you have eliminated the obvious, the cause could be stress, sensitivity to movement, fear or more subtle problems. Clothier recommends a chiropractic checkup. "I've seen dogs who were poor travelers change dramatically when they were adjusted," she said. "It seems that subluxations [incomplete dislocations] in the neck, particularly at the atlas [the first vertebra of the neck], can contribute to motion sickness or uneasiness, possibly due to inner-ear disturbances."

Your dog may also be reacting poorly to different water or unfamiliar food. Carry a supply of both from home. Make sure your dog has plenty of water in the car, and provide additional water about every two hours at rest stops. Also, as with humans suffering from motion sickness, it may help if the dog sits facing forward and has access to fresh air.

Some veterinarians recommend withholding food six to eight hours before travel, but this can be difficult if your dog is used to being fed in the morning or requires regular meals to keep its body systems balanced. Instead, try a motion sickness preventive. Holistic-minded pet owners use ginger to soothe tummy turmoil. Ginger capsules, bulk dried ginger or ginger extracts are available at health food stores and some supermarkets.

Read the directions on the label and reduce the dose proportionally, according to the weight of your dog. For example, according to a general dosing rule from herbalist Gregory Tilford of Animal's Apawthecary in Conner, Mont., if the dose on the label is for a 150-pound man, divide by the weight of your dog say 25 pounds, which equals one-sixth the dose on the label. If you need to increase the dose, do so in increments of 10 percent, but go no higher than 50 percent above your starting point, Tilford said. You can mix the dried or powdered herb into a small amount of food or add the extract to a little water and administer it with a dropper two to three times daily. If you are unsure of the dosage, ask a veterinarian experienced in using herbs on animals or an herbalist experienced in dosing animals.