

Natural Dog Success Story: Bundled for the Storm

Calming body wrap helps Border Collie cope with extreme thunderstorm anxiety.

Denise Flaim

The dog: Blou, a 10-year-old Border Collie.

The problem: A rescue dog with some major dental problems, Blou had to have seven extractions and two root canals after he was adopted by Jay Monti four years ago. Soon after the surgeries, Blou started to have seizures, and he became petrified of thunderstorms.

“He just salivated and quivered and quaked and was nuts,” Monti remembers. “He didn’t get behind the couch, he wanted to get under it.”

The conventional approach: Some veterinarians prescribe antidepressants such as clomipramine or Prozac for dogs with thunderstorm phobias. But such chemical intervention has its drawbacks: The drugs need to be carefully monitored, and some owners report a change in their dog’s personality, as well as increased lethargy and sleepiness.

Sedatives such as acepromazine are another option, but timing can be a stumbling block. The drug doesn’t take effect instantly, and anticipating a storm two hours in advance can be challenging.

The holistic approach: Desperate to help his blue-eyed Border Collie, Monti ordered The Anxiety Wrap, a snug-fitting fabric body suit that works on the premise that “maintained pressure” can reprogram the body to react differently to stress. The wrap exerts a moderate, steady pressure on certain areas of the body, calming overstimulated sensory receptors in the skin and muscles, which in turn allows the animal to relax.

This bodywork approach for calming and centering isn’t new: Tellington Touch, a system of non-specific touches developed by equestrian Linda Tellington-Jones, uses a “body wrap” made of an Ace bandage or other stretchy fabric to rebuild neural pathways with continual gentle pressure.

The results: The day after The Anxiety Wrap arrived, a thunderstorm hit, and Monti dutifully put the body suit on Blou, who responded immediately. “Instead of getting behind the couch, he got on the couch and went to sleep,” says Monti, who keeps one wrap at home and another in the car, just in case the weather changes.

“He hasn’t learned to live with it,” Monti says of his dog’s storm-induced anxiety, which resurfaces if he doesn’t wear The Anxiety Wrap. “He can tell me three hours before it’s going to thunder.”

Other applications: Veterinarian Jennifer Forsyth, VMD, recommends The Anxiety Wrap for two other behavioral issues she sees in her practice: separation anxiety and acting out when guests arrive. “We have a lot of dogs that for some reason can’t deal with company, and they act fearful or just go ballistic.”

Forsyth estimates she’s recommended The Anxiety Wrap to about 50 clients, “and I haven’t had anybody who’s called back and said it doesn’t work.” The advantage of the body suit over drugs, is “with The Anxiety Wrap, you’re not going to have a sedated dog. You’re going to have a dog that’s aware of his surroundings, just able to cope.”

Though Blou took to The Anxiety Wrap right away, Forsyth suggests introducing it “when there isn’t a stressful situation like a storm.” A couple of half-hour sessions — buffered with lots of tasty treats — should win over the skeptics. “Some dogs,” she notes wryly, “are better about wearing clothes than others.”

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